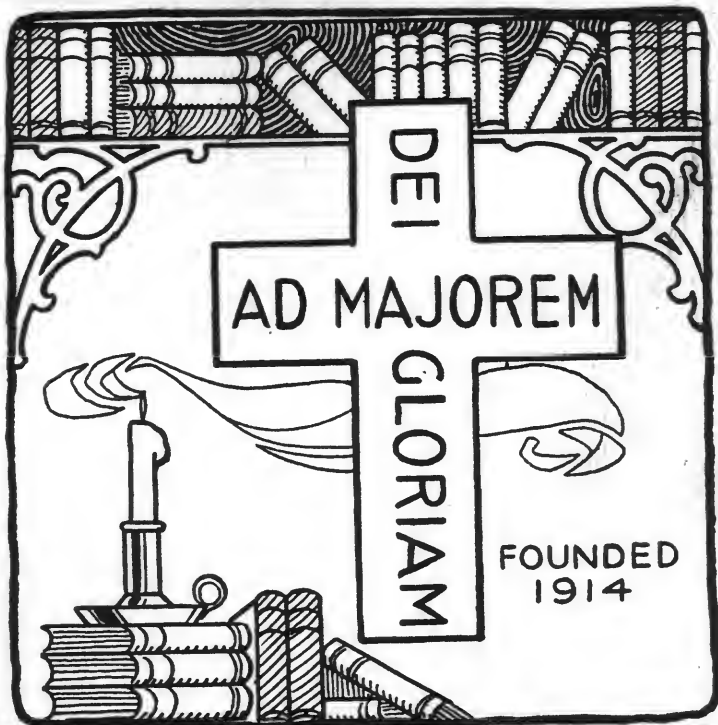


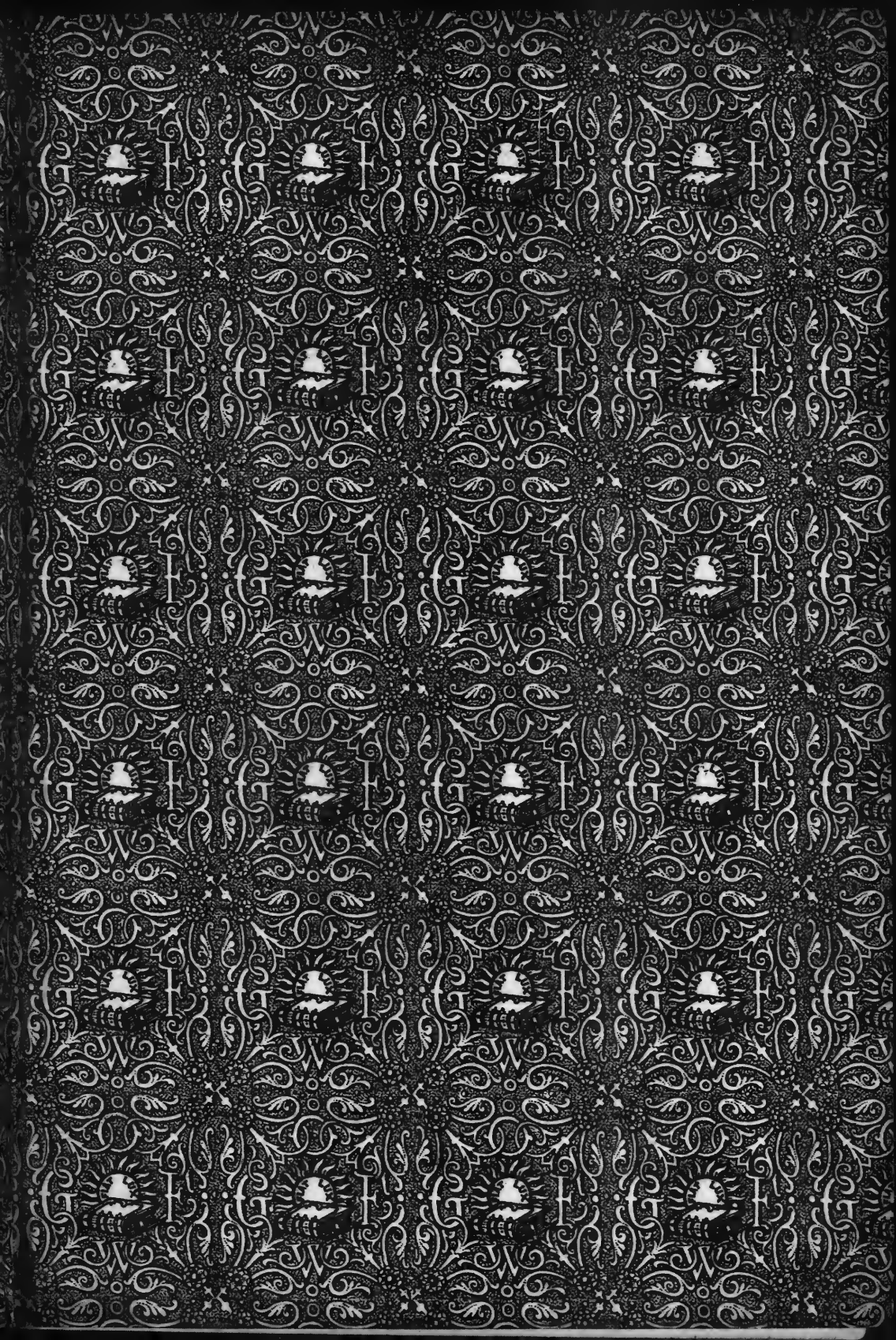
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METHODISM  
AND THE  
CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
*A COMPARISON*

BY  
A LAYMAN

*Cannon*

"Non te offendat auctoritas scribendi, utrum parvæ vel magnæ literaturæ fuerit, sed amor puræ veritatis te trahat ad legendum. Non quæras quis hoc dixerit. sed quid dicatur attende."—*De Imit. Christi*, i. 5, 1.

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## INTRODUCTION.



AMONG the many misgivings which the writer of these pages entertains with regard to his work, he has at least no feeling that it is unnecessary. It is true that works of every conceivable description load the shelves of the theologian, and the author is perhaps sanguine in thinking he has detected a vacant place. Still, a fair discussion of the points at issue between Churchmen and Wesleyans seems at present to be wanting, and it also seems desirable that one should be available. Why is no such book in existence?

The answer to this question is not far to seek. Such a discussion can only be attempted by a person who knows pretty intimately the inner life of both parties. He must be familiar by experience, not only with book descriptions and published formulæ, but with the actual practice of which these are the outward expression. He must, if a Churchman, not

only have read the life of Wesley, the "deedpoll" and the "model deed," the "Minutes of the Conference," and so on, but he ought to know the system of thought and feeling actually prevailing in Methodist Societies. In such knowledge as this, nearly all Churchmen are conspicuously deficient. Most of them have never been in a Wesleyan chapel in their lives. The inner life of "class meeting," "covenant service" and "love feast" is absolutely foreign to them. They are, therefore, in most cases utterly unable to make a fair or correct comparison between two systems, of one of which, at the best, all they know is the outward letter, and the part unknown to them is the inspiring idea, without which an outward formula is a mere skeleton.

Most Wesleyans are in no better position with regard to the Church. They may know something of the Prayer Book and its services, but of the history of the Church, and of her claim founded on that history, they are entirely ignorant. In this case, also, a knowledge of the ideas which inspire and animate Churchmen is absolutely necessary to the man who would frame a critical estimate. No one can compare the ideas of the two parties who has not actually lived within the spheres of their influence, in surroundings where that influence was potent.

This then is the reason why no one has yet been found to attempt this comparison in a satisfactory manner ; so few persons are qualified for it by actual experience. This qualification at least, if no other, is possessed by the author of these pages, and this is his apology for writing them.

Designedly he has written a little book. Agreeing with the old proverb which declares a big book to be a big evil, he has, in dealing with subjects any one of which might be expanded to fill a folio, laid upon himself a severe rule of conciseness. It was a wise man who wrote "the words of the wise are as goads," and who proved in his own writings how very short sentences might prove to be a stimulus to very much reflection. And the author would rather stir up those who read him to think for themselves, than exhaust the subject in a complete but wearisome treatise.

No pretence is made in these pages to the possession of special learning or knowledge. If the author has here and there inserted a reference, it has been to save his readers trouble in finding the source of a quotation, or the authority for a statement. It has not been with the object of assuming knowledge, or of pretending to research.

This work is not written for scholars or learned theologians, it is for plain ordinary Christians; being,

in fact, nothing more than a statement of the considerations which made it clear to one ordinary unlearned layman that it was his duty to rejoin the Church of England.

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# METHODISM

AND

## THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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### CHAPTER I.

Methodism Modern and Derivative—The Church in the Eighteenth Century—The Wesleyans and the Masses—Wesley unwilling to Secede—Causes of Secession—The Church Ancient and National—Reformation—Evangelical Movement—Oxford Movement—Reasons why a Wesleyan should return.

MODERN habits of thought turn more and more to the historical method of examining existing facts. It is now a settled rule that really to understand any institution you must know how it came to be. The state of things before its rise—the inspiring thought, the guiding hand to which it owes its origin—these are the matters which must be ascertained in order fairly to estimate the contemporary fact as it presents itself for examination.

This method of investigation has of late years

been applied as vigorously to religious as to any other institutions. The various religious societies which make up Christendom are, each in turn, subjected to the strong light of historic criticism—and it will not be out of place in the fore-front of this inquiry to consider the early history of Wesleyan Methodism.

Suppose, then, that a Wesleyan who has not hitherto devoted much thought to the subject is led to examine the history of the community to which he belongs. Two facts will at once be very prominent—that such community is *modern*, and that it is *derivative*. He need not explore long vistas of Church history, and trace his society through the varying conditions of ages, for Methodism is only 150 years old; nor need he pursue through the dust of ages the development of the creeds and doctrines he professes, for Methodism derived them from the Church of England, of which she once formed a part. He sees, in a word, that Methodism was an offshoot, a secession from an older society, and owes its origin and its success to the genius of Wesley, who may well compare with Luther and with Loyola in the gift of organizing religious fervour into settled societies. The most elementary survey of the subject will have informed the inquirer that the founder of Methodism was not only a clergyman of, but during a long life consistently devoted to, the Mother

Church of his country. He will also gather that Methodism for a period of nearly sixty years (1738-1796) actually formed an integral part of the Church of England, having no quarrel with her doctrines and receiving the most sacred rites at her altars. And if he have any family records extending back to the days of his own grandparents, he will almost certainly find that hardly two generations ago Methodists still deemed themselves to be members of the Church, and, unlike all other Nonconformists, denied by word and act that they were *Dissenters* at all. The inquiry could hardly stop here. These striking facts would certainly lead any one who apprehends them to examine further. He will surely ask himself, "If these things be so, how is it that I find myself outside the Church of England at all?" To answer this inquiry he will be bound to examine what causes were at work in the Church life of the 18th century, which tended to produce the Methodist movement.

The 18th century was certainly a period to which no Churchman can look back with very much satisfaction. It was an age characterized by utilitarian ethics, a low level of spiritual life, a languid belief, and but little active philanthropy. The corrupt and debasing methods by which political influence was secured, the shameless disregard of morality, even of

decency, in the highest circles, and the prevailing unbelief in literary quarters, revealed too sadly an absence of the "power of Godliness," and even of its form.

It was not likely in an age when society was in so many respects at its worst, that the Church should appear at her best, nor that her influence for good should be most marked. There were indeed many combining causes which both made her influence less powerful, and her work less effectual than it should have been. The Church of England is always the most vigorous, the most holy, and the most effective where the tone of thought, generally styled "High Church" is prominent among her members. But in the reigns of the first two Georges this class of thought was, owing to political causes, outside the Church, in the ranks of the Non-Jurors. Learned and saintly men like Ken could not be excluded from Church preferment, without the Church being the loser by it; and even when the Non-Jurors began gradually to return to her fold, they found the school of thought to which they belonged in but little credit with the civil authorities. Premiers like Walpole and Pelham found it to the interest of the new dynasty to confer Church preferment on men of Erastian views and colourless theology, who had no inconvenient enthusiasm for Church principles, and would

give no trouble to the Hanoverian Sovereigns. The Non-Jurors were politically unpopular, and the doctrines and practices they taught almost died out for a time.\* The Church must have suffered not a little by the almost total disappearance of a party who were thoroughly in earnest, generally learned and pious, and of a tenderness of conscience which was in very great contrast with the prevailing tone, both in religion and politics.

The Church in that age reflected only too faithfully some of the features of the time. A historian of that period has observed that "The Church . . . . was of all institutions the most intensely and most distinctly English. Occasionally, indeed, great outbursts of political sycophancy, or of sacerdotal extravagance within its borders, have brought it into collision with the broad stream of English thought ; but considered as a whole, and in most periods of its history, it may justly claim to have been eminently national. Its love of compromise, its dislike to pushing principles to extreme consequences, its decorum, its social aspects, its instinctive aversion to abstract speculation, to fanatical action, to vehement, spontaneous, mystical, or ascetic forms of devotion ; its admirable skill in strengthening the orderly and philanthropic

\* See Abbey and Overton, "The Church of England in the 18th Century," chap. ii.



elements of society, in moderating and regulating character, and blending with the various phases of national life, all reflected with singular fidelity English modes of thought and feeling, the strength and the weakness of the English character."\* Opinions will vary as to the truth of this portrait, drawn by a not too friendly hand. But if ever it was a true one, it was in the 18th century. External society was pervaded by two strong opinions on religious subjects, viz. a dislike to dogmatic statements, and a preference for natural religion, that is, a theory of morals unconnected with doctrine; and an even greater dislike to emotion or enthusiasm in religion. The Deist, as the exponent of natural religion was called, struck out of the Christian system all which was miraculous, supernatural, or mysterious, making his reason the only touchstone of his faith. This cold and cheerless substitute for the supernal enthusiasm of the religion of Christ, seems to have been the prevailing form of thought in the intellectual circles of England when Wesley was a young man.† Bishop Butler's remark is well known: "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons, that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at last discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if in

\* Lecky, "History of England in the 18th Century," i. 74.

† See On Deism, Abbey and Overton, chap. iii.

the present age this were an agreed point among all people of discernment." \* And all the evidence is to the same effect.

The Church met the assaults of the Deists with masterly ability. Apologetic treatises abounded, some of which were of permanent value, and have survived to our day. The works of Butler, Lardner, Warburton, will always remain as monuments which crown these battle-fields, and record the Church's victory.† But in these apologetic combats the spirit of the assailants insensibly moulded that of the defenders. Arguing with the advocates of natural religion upon their own premises, the Churchmen acquired a good deal of their tone of thought. So much was conceded in the argument, that many elements of religion became obscured, or passed out of sight. The supernatural facts which are the basis of Christianity ceased to operate powerfully on men's hearts, and prevalent theology became cold, undogmatic, rational. The aim of the preacher, or the writer, was to enforce a system of cool, rational, calculating ethics, to reason men into goodness. To exhort, to awaken, to stir up men, was no longer the aim of Christian teachers. Appeals to the moving stories of Divine redeeming love were out of date. Nothing could show more plainly how Christianity was in danger of losing its distinctive elements, than

\* Preface to "Analogy," 1736.

† See Lecky, ii. 544.

the fact that Pope's "Essay on Man," a mere transcript of the Deism of Bolingbroke, could be thought by anybody to be a defence of Revealed religion.\*

Christianity being thus treated as a sort of elevated natural religion, its teachers were not likely to look favourably on the emotional element in it. Recollections of the extravagances of the Puritans, coupled with the contemptuous attitude of Freethinkers, caused enthusiasm to be out of fashion. Religion was to be rather an affair of the reason than of the heart, and apologies and defences of its claims appealed to external evidences or logical principles, rather than to the feelings or the affections.

The sermons of the period, even those of the greatest preachers, such as Tillotson, show the operation of these two principles, the rationalizing spirit and the repugnance to anything emotional, in full measure.

The sermon of this age was almost free from dogma. It says hardly anything of the person or work of Christ, the influence of the Holy Spirit, of Divine love or Divine Grace. The mystical, the supernatural, are out of place in these "moral essays." It is the preacher's object to argue in favour of good morals, for they will produce happiness to the individual and the society in which he

\* Courthope's "Life of Pope," p. 329.

dwells. Virtue is inculcated, not by urging the great truths of revealed religion, but by a series of motives and inducements which are the common stock of all moralists, Pagan as well as Christian. The preacher has no desire to stir up emotions or awaken warm earnest feelings ; he lays before his hearers a logical and correct statement of reasons which he trusts will convince the mind. And the style ! “Neither rapture nor vehemence, no wit, no imagination, no original or brilliant idea, no philosophy, nothing but quotations of mere scholarship and enumerations from a hand-book.” \* No doubt this style of preaching was suited to the tastes and feelings of Churchmen in that age, or it would not have been so general ; but it was little calculated to inflame the love or strengthen the faith even of the pious, far less to reform the immoral or bring in those who were outside the regular sphere of the Church’s operations.†

And it should not be overlooked that the external decencies of Christian worship were at this period very much overlooked. The churches were often out of repair, dirty, and neglected. The ornaments of the altar were mean and dilapidated. No choir decently vested aided the work of the clergyman by

\* Taine, “History of English Literature,” bk. 3, c. 3, sec. 5.

† See, as to these Sermons, Abbey and Overton, chap. iv.

leading the devotions of the people. The liturgy was performed as a sort of duologue between the parson and the clerk. None of the hymns, which are now considered an essential part of Christian worship, were available; the songs of the people were restricted to the metrical version of the Psalms, and there was very little music in the service at all.

✓ Communion was very rare, sometimes only three or four in the year. In fact, the comely Ritual, the beauty of holiness, in which the favoured Englishman of our day is everywhere able to worship the Lord, was hardly to be seen outside a Cathedral or Collegiate Church.

But, notwithstanding these various causes of weakness and languor, the Church had still the Bible and the Prayer Book. While these were in constant use the great truths and incentives of Christianity could never be forgotten or become inoperative, and there are many facts which make it clear that the Church, even in so dark a period, was to multitudes of her children a true mother, a fountain of spiritual life. It was in this period that the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge was first formed, and that the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the first English missionary effort since the Reformation, began its work.\* Nor does the Church lose

\* Lecky, ii. 546.

anything by a comparison with the Protestant Dissenting bodies of the<sup>re</sup> period. The one great dogmatic controversy of that time, the battle with Arianism and Socinianism, hardly shook for a moment the ancient faith of the Church. Of the Dissenting bodies a very large number became avowedly Unitarian, and have been so ever since,\* while, on the other hand, large numbers of Dissenters joined the Church, and there was perhaps never a period when English Nonconformity was so weak in numbers or in influence as just at the time when Methodism was born.

Among the recruits from Dissent to the Church were both the parents of Mr. Wesley, who are, perhaps, not unworthy examples of the way in which even in that age pious and exemplary lives could be lived in a country parsonage. The father, when placed in a parish full of profligate and wicked people, so faithfully admonished them as to excite a spirit of diabolical hatred, so that, after two unsuccessful attempts, they at last burnt his parsonage to the ground over his head. Mrs. Wesley became a Churchwoman after having examined the controversy between Church and Dissent with conscientious diligence. She conducted the religious education of her children with the most solemn earnestness, and

\* See chap. iv. *post*.



found time during her husband's absence from home to instruct a large body of parishioners in her Sunday afternoon meetings.

There cannot be much doubt that John Wesley's early piety was not a little owing to the consistent religious lives of his parents, and the loving care they devoted to his religious education. The picture of the Epworth household, if it stood alone, would be enough to show what religious life there was in the Church even in this irreligious age.\*

But it does not stand alone. Many similar instances might be found, one of which may be mentioned here, which has been made notable by its having engaged the pen of Wordsworth. In 1735 or 1736 (only a year or two before the founding of Methodism), the Rev. Robert Walker became curate of Seathwaite, a lonely Westmoreland valley, where he ministered for sixty-seven years. Here, on a stipend barely sufficient to supply the merest necessities of life, tilling his own ground, making his own clothes, bringing up and educating twelve children, he laboured with Apostolic zeal in the duties of his sacred calling. In that secluded vale the church was filled, summer and winter—the Saints' days were observed, the sick were visited, the poor relieved—

\* See Southey's "Life of Wesley," chap. i.; also Wedgwood's "Wesley."

there was never a Dissenter in the parish. The pastor was the schoolmaster, and his holy, beautiful life enforced his precepts to old and young. His memory lived long in his native dales, and has been enshrined by the poet in imperishable verse :

"Him the 'Wonderful,'  
Our simple shepherds, speaking from the heart,  
Deservedly have styled."

To the Churchman in every age his simple story will be a proof that, even in those evil times, the services of the Church, faithfully performed, failed not to produce the most striking results.\*

From these country clergymen, living removed from the follies and vices of the town, and from much of its declared unbelief, we turn to a layman living in London, and prominent in literature. One of the most notable sights in the eighteenth century is the Churchmanship of Samuel Johnson. Carlyle† was right when he called it a thing to be looked at with reverence. This great man, the most noticeable leader in the literature of the day, was a devout observer of the order prescribed by the Church of England, and found her services adequate to the deepest needs of his soul. It is touching to read in

\* See Wordsworth's "Notes on the Sonnets to the Duddon," and "Excursion," Book vii.

† "Heroes," Lect. V.

his private diary how (to take an example) on Easter Day, 1764, after spending the previous evening in meditation and prayer, he went to church and to Communion:—"I prayed for resolution and perseverance to amend my life. I received soon; the communicants were many. At the altar it occurred to me that I ought to form some resolutions. I resolved, in the presence of God, but without a vow, to repel sinful thoughts, to study eight hours daily, and, I think, to go to church every Sunday and read the Scriptures. . . . I prayed earnestly for amendment, and repeated my prayer at home."\* Thus it was that Dr. Johnson spent Easter Day. The record of his Easter Days alone would be sufficient answer to those who would say that the Church of England was without grace or power in the eighteenth century.

It is plain from the examples given above, and from many others which the literature of the eighteenth century could supply, that the Church still ministered to the spiritual wants of a large number of those who were accustomed to make use of her services. But the special want of the age was that so large a portion of the people lay outside the sphere of her ministrations. She had forgotten her missionary duty to the heathen both at home and

\* "Boswell's Life," ed. Croker, chap. 18

abroad—the poor had not the Gospel preached to them. There failed that restless, aggressive spirit, which by loving constraint seeks to compel men to come in. Large bodies of dissolute, degraded men in London, Bristol, and other large towns were left to their sins and their misery. The colliers at Kingswood, the sight of whom so much touched the heart of Whitfield, were only types of masses elsewhere, heathens in a Christian land. For some there was no church available; others were in parishes where negligent, dissolute, or ignorant parsons cared nothing for their souls. And the Church was not making the efforts she ought to have done to bring in those who should have been her peculiar care.

Probably when Wesley, his brother, and Whitfield laid their hands to the gigantic task of evangelizing these heathen masses, they had no idea that their work would tend to the formation of an external society separate from the Church of their birth. But as their work progressed the logic of events seemed to lead to this culmination. It is now pretty well agreed that the attitude of the bishops and parish clergy towards this strange new movement was not unreasonable. The riots and disturbances, the strange developments of frenzy and fanaticism, the epilepsy and madness, sicknesses and deaths, which were the result of these exciting services, would in

any age be distressing to calm and reverent minds. The language and modes of expression which Wesley had learnt from his Moravian teachers, distorted and exaggerated by ignorant men, struck against two violent prejudices—hatred of the Puritanical cant of Cromwellian days, and fear of the Roman orders, who had used somewhat similar enthusiastic terms. Again the furious quarrels of the new teachers among themselves, Wesley's attack upon Law, his embittered controversies with the Moravians, with Whitfield, Toplady, Berridge, and others, prevented many good men from perceiving what there was distinctive in his novel presentation of the Gospel. Add the prevalent dislike of emotion and enthusiasm in religion, and the natural jealousy of men who see their authority and credit undermined in their own lawfully appointed spheres of labour, and it will be pretty evident that in the then state of the Church it was almost impossible for her to incorporate the new organization in her existing arrangements. Wesley's converts were different in kind from every previously formed body of Dissenters. The Independents and Presbyterians, the Brownists and Separatists, under the Stuart kings, were invariably seceders from a Church order they did not approve of. Could they have remodelled that order to their liking they would have remained Churchmen.

Until the close of the Savoy Conference destroyed their hopes of carrying out their wishes they did not definitely declare themselves Nonconformists. But the first Methodists, or at any rate the great majority of them, were as detached from Church influence at the time of their conversion as any heathens or savages. Mr. Wesley always professed, and at times seriously strove, to bring and keep them in union with the Church, against whose doctrine and practice he had no quarrel. To regard them as a body of seceders from the Church whose orders he bore would have been to his mind simply impossible.

But Wesley was a born organizer and ruler. He had perhaps the finest gift for organizing ever possessed by an Englishman ; and a born administrator, especially of the English race, does not frame symmetrical paper constitutions in advance of requirements. He legislates *pro re nata*, and devises an arrangement when it is wanted. Such was Mr. Wesley's method when he built up his societies. At first he had only a number of individual converts, but his practical mind did not allow him to leave the matter there. Meeting-houses were built to preach and hold prayer-meetings in, and to raise funds to pay for the buildings the "class meeting" was devised. Preachers were required to conduct the services in



the buildings, and so by very necessity the order of "lay preachers" was instituted. A conference with his brother and a few clergy and lay preachers led to an annual assembly or parliament, where all the affairs of the new Society were discussed, and suitable legislation was effected. Then came the territorial division into "circuits," which would soon undermine any lingering respect a Methodist might feel with regard to the parish in which he lived. And finally the celebrated deed poll which—by its ingenious establishment of the "legal hundred," the Senate of Methodism—gave perpetual succession to the sect, and made it impossible that the chapels built by Methodists for their worship should ever pass to any other use.

Completely organized, severely disciplined, and possessed of property settled upon legal trusts, what lay between Methodism and absolute separation? And yet this elaborate organization had not been framed with any such object; and it almost seems to have been by accident that the body of Wesley's converts grew into a separate sect. Certainly such was not Mr. Wesley's deliberate plan. His career was full of inconsistencies, and the contrast between his words and his acts is strange and startling. While with masterly skill he built up a system whose only possible issue could be separation, he insisted upon

continued union. While he ordained and consecrated as though he was a bishop of bishops—a very Pope—he impressed upon his societies over and over again, to the end of his life, that they must not leave the Church. His last utterance on the subject was that famous one, “I live and die a member of the Church of England, and none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.” \*

So great was his power and so strong his determination upon this point, that the formal separation, almost inevitable as it had become, did not take place till after his death. Even then it was hastened by a political difficulty arising out of the Toleration Act, and the objections of the authorities to license the Methodists’ chapels unless they would declare themselves to be Dissenters.† As they could not hold services at all unless the chapels were licensed, it must have seemed very hard that their very adhesion to the Church should lead to these unpleasant results ; and many must have felt that if by becoming Dissenters they could purchase peace and quietness, the price was not too much to pay.

And so it came about that after sixty years of union with the Church, Methodism became a Dissent-

\* See Smith’s “History of Wesleyan Methodism,” i. pp. 291, 361, 563, 586, &c., where the passages are given.

† See an instance, Southey, chap. 29.

ing body. Ever since that day, now nearly a hundred years gone by, Churchmen have grieved over this loss, and do yet grieve day by day to see so large a body of pious and worthy Christians separated from their communion, not, in many cases, by a deliberate choice or a reasoned hostility, but by force of accidental circumstances which were in operation in 1796.

The inquirer who has followed thus far the origin of the Methodist Society and realized these pregnant facts—that it was intended by its founder to be a part of the Church of England, and actually was so for two generations—will naturally be led to look with more interest upon this great Society which was the mother of his own. Hitherto he has probably, after the manner of many Methodists, looked upon the Church with a sort of faint unreasoning dislike, as a Society rather larger than his own, which seems to make somewhat extensive claims, and whose doings seem to attract a great deal more public attention than he can quite account for. He now begins to examine the history of the Church to see if he can understand why Mr. Wesley was so strongly attached to it. But what a vista of historical inquiry opens out before him! The history of the Church is the history of England. Her antiquity, continuity, majesty, overcome the inquirer's mind. Here is an

institution now living and working, which is older than the Monarchy or any family in the peerage, older than Parliament, or the Constitution, or the Judiciary; almost older, one may say, than the English language, or the English nation. The Church has been for 1,200 successive years an embodiment of the best and highest life in England. This antiquity is impressed on her very being, and traces of it are everywhere. It is startling to find how much of the existing Church system is ante-Norman; how many episcopal sees and parishes, how many endowments, may be traced back to arrangements which were in existence when Bede wrote. Many a line of bishops can be traced without a break to the days when the Saxons became Christians. In many a cathedral and parish church a man may worship God on ground, if not in a building, which has been consecrated to Divine service for 1,000 years. While language and manners, and dynasties and modes of government, have changed, the generations have marched past the Church, and she has stood. It is this antiquity, this long life parallel with the civil life of the nation, which has made the Church in the largest and best sense NATIONAL. For during this long period the Church not only existed, but lived. English history is full of her doings, and the names of her great

men. Anselm, Becket, Langton, Wolsey, Cranmer, Laud—such names as these illumined the records of the days they lived in. The roll of the Archbishops of Canterbury from Augustine to the present day is an epitome of their country's story. Amid the changing conditions of every age the Church stands out as alone continuous, and her members of to-day feel it not the least of their privileges that they are connected with the one element of national life which from the first to the last has been permanent and abiding.

Nor is this the less true because the English Church, with all the other churches of Western Christendom, succumbed for a time, and to a certain extent, to the corrupt and wrongful jurisdiction of the Roman See, and the mediæval corruptions which that jurisdiction brought with it—nor because that Church has had her bad days of apathy and sloth. The treasure was hidden in earthen vessels, but was none the less real and precious. Her Reformation was conducted upon sounder principles, and left behind it better results than were produced in any country in Europe. The combination of boldness and caution, of vigorous repudiation of what was modern, and steadfast adherence to what was ancient, which marked the English Reformers of the 16th century, was at that date unique in Europe,

and showed a power of sound judgment in our Church which was by no means so apparent in the German, Dutch, or Swiss Reformers. An acquaintance with the principles upon which these Continental Reformers proceeded, and the results of their work, will certainly augment the thankfulness with which an English Churchman contemplates the Reformation of his own Church.

Since Mr. Wesley's day, two great streams of influence have passed over the English Church. The influence of his work within that Church was perhaps as notable as it was without. Many clergymen were his coadjutors ; many more sympathized in his opinions. In the preaching of such men, the doctrines which had been almost lost sight of again became prominent. Religion became more personal and real, enthusiasm and zeal ceased to be out of fashion, practical philanthropy received an impulse. The "Evangelical Succession,"\* as an interesting writer has styled the leaders of this school, became the foremost religious figures for the rest of the 18th century. Out of this school of thought came the men who reformed prisons, and abolished slavery, and softened the cruelties of the criminal law. It was in its day and generation a most useful school, and yet after a time its influence in the Church, to a

\* Sir James Stephen's "Essays on Ecclesiastical Biography."

great extent, died out as the first impulse seemed to be spent. The peculiar doctrines\* upon which the scheme of thought known as "Evangelical" rested, were never universally popular among Churchmen, and were not suited to be a permanent type of religious expression in the Church. Then came the second great Oxford Movement, another mighty wave of religious thought, charged with far-reaching results. It is not much more than fifty years since to some the continued existence of the Church of England seemed doubtful, when her enemies were shouting that her hour was come, and the hearts of those who loved her best were failing them for fear.† We can see now by the light of subsequent events how groundless were these hopes and these fears. A wider survey, a surer insight, might have taught both foes and friends that the Church had within her powers of rapid recovery, and store of loving hearts which could accomplish marvels. Men should have remembered—perhaps they did remember—what a few Oxford men had accomplished a hundred years before. At any rate the time had come, and once more in Oxford a great religious movement arose. The contemplations of a few men in Oriel

\* See chap. v. *post*.

† See Burgon's "Twelve Good Men." The Life of H. J. Rose, i. pp. 150-7.

College set on foot a revival of religious life, and produced results as momentous and far-reaching as those produced by the handful of men who held "methodical" meetings in Lincoln College a century earlier. Not only in the outward decencies of religious worship, but in the weightier matters, in personal holiness, self-denial, good works, higher aims, deeper faith, there are to be traced the results of the later Oxford Movement. Yet had it been a movement of ritual and rubric mainly, its results are manifest enough in every church in the land. The edge of the wave has touched even the most rigid of Dissenters, who now rear Gothic chapels, in which their Puritan ancestors would have stabled horses, and painted windows they would have destroyed as idolatrous; while Wesleyans sing Keble's and Newman's hymns, and decorate their chapels for harvest thanksgivings and Christmas-day services.

There was one point in which the later Oxford Movement differed essentially from the earlier. It did not create a new Society; it strengthened men's love for the old; it feared schism and division; it claimed adherence to the Church's principles, instead of pushing them to one side. The respect for Church order which the Wesleys felt, it enforced; instead of organizing men into Societies outside the Church, it taught them the benefits of a visible and



organic unity. Instead of teaching men to become Dissenters, it has taught Dissenters to become Churchmen.

How the Wesleys would have welcomed such a movement as this! How cordially would they have concurred in its principles, and approved its teachings. To them it would surely have been the very ideal of Christian work, "to spread Scriptural holiness through the land" within the limits of that Church order of which they so thoroughly approved. Had the later Oxford Movement been possible in their day, would not John Wesley have been one of its pioneers, and Charles its inspired poet?

These considerations will suggest to a Wesleyan inquirer that it is not sufficient for him that his ancestors once became Wesleyan—the question for him to consider is whether he ought to remain so. It is not for him to rest content with the assertion that the Church of England in the eighteenth century failed in her duty, and was not a spiritual home for his forefathers. That may be true, but for him to-day the very converse may be true. Let him, after reading the rather sombre descriptions of what is past, look around upon the present and contemplate the Church of England to-day. He will exclaim with a great statesman, "There are few great things left in England, and the Church is one!" He will

see an institution venerable with antiquity and the authority which comes with age, yet with the vigour and resolution of youth. He will see worship solemn yet joyful, comely with beautiful ritual yet intensely spiritual. He will hear in her pulpits and read in her doctors a firm assertion of truths as old as Christianity, and a full appreciation of the thought current at the present day. He will see a ministry distinguished throughout the world for sacred learning. More important than all, he will perceive the fruits of good living. He will see mission work, temperance work, charity, education, a constant care of the poor. He will see good men and women giving their lives to the service of their fellow-men. He will hear of missions to the heathen and of martyr bishops. In short, he will find that in every department of good work the Church is to the fore. He has perhaps been accustomed to hear it said that a Wesleyan who passes over to the Church enters a less spiritual atmosphere. A very slight experience of Church worship will remove such an impression.\* He will begin to feel that in dissenting from the Church he is depriving himself of so much he would value and love. He will feel that what he now sees is widely different from that Church

\* See "Life of Bishop Wordsworth," p. 286 ; the remarks of a local preacher.

of the eighteenth century which his forefathers left, perhaps with pain and reluctance. He will reason thus: "They may have been right in their dissent. It may have been to them a gain. I cannot say. But Dissent seems to me to be wrong. I lose by it. I cut myself off from the old and venerable to ally myself with the modern and derivative. The Church did nothing for them. It would be all to me. The reasons they separated from it have ceased. It is time the separation ceased too. The rude but sincere worship of the Methodist Chapel may have been for them more spiritual than that of their Church as then conducted. How far inferior it is to that to which I have access! They parted with what was ancient and national. May I not regain it? They came out. I judge them not, but I will go back."

And (of late years especially) many have gone back, and probably their number will be largely increased in a not distant future. For the line of thought suggested above is one which appeals with peculiar force to a Wesleyan. His case is not quite the same as that of an Independent, a Baptist, or a Presbyterian. Their ancestors, as has already been observed, deliberately seceded from the Church. Some point of order or discipline, some practice or ritual seemed to them wrong, and as they could not approve of it or move the National Church to their way of thinking, it would, to their minds, have seemed wrong to remain.

Until one of them changes his opinion on such points, or comes to regard them of less importance than Christian unity, how can he go back ?

But it is quite different with the Wesleyan. He has really no dispute with the Church as to her doctrines, while his revered founder bore her orders and respected them. His parents, or at any rate his grandparents, found it a delight to go to church—their children (and perhaps he himself) were baptized and confirmed in their parish—they were probably married at Church, and buried within her consecrated ground by her clergy. There was nothing about them of political dissent, or the furious rancour of the other Nonconforming bodies. They were only not Church people because they happened to have been born and brought up in another community. No prejudice, no scruple of conscience, nothing but habit and training, kept them outside. It would have surprised and distressed these worthy, kindly non-assentors, these almost Churchmen, to find their Society transformed in great measure to a state of violent dissent, hating the Church and throwing themselves into the armies of her foes. It had been for them far less of a change to become Churchmen at once than to become Wesleyans of this sort. And so their descendant, if he is to remain in their Society, will have to break with their traditions. The hallowed memories of the past must suffer violence if

the posterity of such persons are to be enemies of the Church. With the solemn voice of twelve centuries, which calls him back to the National Church, mingle these sweet echoes of childhood. And as he must choose between enmity and union, and he cannot hate, he will surely leave the temporary abiding-place, where chance rather than choice has placed him, and go back to the old home.

He who has thus returned with a full knowledge of the historical bearings of the question may well feel exultant ; he has passed from the modern to the ancient, from the derivative to the original. He is in touch with his country's history, and what is more, with the history of Christianity. That history has for him a new and strange importance. For him its annals do not now begin at the honoured name of John Wesley, though he honours it as much as ever he did. His lineage now runs back to Augustine, and they who were Augustine's spiritual ancestry. And he gains a better view of Church history, for in every age the Church was being in some way or other got ready to be his home. It is not now his habit to leave out of view the period from Saint Paul to Luther as either a blank page on which there is no writing intelligible to him, or a record of human folly and error with no redeeming feature. Such has too often been the attitude of the ultra-evangelical school. Nor is he obliged in reading Church history

to postulate that every mediæval error is of Divine authority. Such is the method of the Roman controversialist. But the special good fortune, the goodly heritage of the English Churchman, is that his view allows him to take historical facts as they are, recognizing what is good, blaming where blame is due. As in stately succession the long procession of the English Church winds before him, age after age displaying its varied aspects, he confesses with thankfulness its delivery of the Divine message in every age, even when most clouded with superstition, or incrusted with worldliness or sunk in sloth. He acknowledges the good work, the well-meant endeavour, the holy life, in whatever century he finds it; he learns the truly divine gift of making allowances. He can admire Laud without depreciating Simeon. Latimer will not be too blunt for him, nor Cranmer too cautious, nor Tillotson too formal. He can at once appreciate the great benefits of monastic institutions in ages of ignorance and violence, and the feelings of the period which swept them away when their day of usefulness was done. It was in his cause that Becket defied kings and Langton contended for popular liberties. For him Saxon earls endowed churches and Norman architects reared glorious Gothic piles. Every religious aspiration of 1,200 years has helped to build the spiritual fabric of which he is privileged to be a member to-day.

## CHAPTER II.

Christian Unity desirable—Numerous Sects in England—  
Practical Evils of Division—Duty of lessening Divisions—  
The Church the only Centre for Reunion—Establishment  
—Appeal of the National and Historic Church.

THE foregoing pages have been occupied with a consideration of the mode in which the question of reunion with the Church would present itself to a Wesleyan on a study of the history of the separation. The line of thought suggested rests upon the individual advantage which such reunion would bring to the inquirer, and if he yielded to this view it would be for his own benefit. By returning to the Church he himself would be made happier or better, or placed in more congenial surroundings. Reasons amply sufficient are these for action. As a great poet has taught us, a man is "of all-importance to himself," and if it is good for him to change his place, that alone is sufficient cause to do so.

It will, however, add not a little to his confidence in the rectitude of his action if it becomes obvious to him that he is not only impelled to it by inclination, but by duty. It is not every one who would like to

feel that he has gone back to the Church solely to gratify himself. Many a man of high tone habitually looks to his duty rather than to his advantage or his inclination. And a few pages will not be ill spent if an attempt be here made to show a point of view in which it is the plain duty of a Wesleyan to rejoin the Church. Let him consider, then, that by doing so he will be able to make a contribution to *Christian Unity*—he will be doing his share towards healing the terrible divisions of Christendom.

Every thoughtful Christian man must surely grieve over the divided state of the Christian world, especially in the English-speaking parts of it. So at least one would expect; and yet experience of the attitude of the religious world does not reveal this feeling as being at all prominent. The facts plainly stated are really startling. There are in England more than two hundred religious bodies\* with independent buildings, ministers, organizations; and a process is going on under which the number of sects is being multiplied every year. If the present rate of things continues for one hundred years more, there seems no reason to doubt that the number of sects may well be doubled. For the quality which has been styled "the dissidence of Dissent" is very potent

\* See the list in Whittaker's Almanack, 1890.



in operation. Long before the Methodists left the Church the adherents of Whitfield and Lady Huntingdon had left *them*, and there are now eight or nine different religious bodies which represent the total result of the Wesleyan separation. Every form of Dissent breaks up, and the broken parts subdivide. Thus there are several groups of Baptists and three kinds of Presbyterians. English Christianity is in fact centrifugal in its nature, and the members of the minutest sect rejoice in having effected a further subdivision. The multiplication of separate societies actually comes to be regarded as a thing laudable or desirable in itself—the more sorts the better. In these days any clever man who wants to be free from any sort of control can break loose from the religious society in which he finds himself and start a new sect of his own, without its occurring to his neighbours that such a proceeding is contrary to Scripture, to primitive Christianity, or even to common sense. The general voice of English Dissent will, on the whole, approve his action, and many another will be encouraged to do the like. What makes the matter most extraordinary is this, that the great majority of these sects have practically the same doctrines, discipline, and practice. There is absolutely no reason for the existence of most of them. Their preachers have no objection to occupy

each other's pulpits, or the people to worship in each other's pews. No scruple of conscience divides them from each other, nor does any advantage to the religious consciousness of the nation result from this endless subdivision, as their views are generally the same. One strong bond of union, indeed, binds them together—it is sad, indeed, to write it—a furious hatred of the Church—and it is equally painful to add that this feeling is too often returned.

“Tantæne animis celestibus iræ.”

It must, however, be thankfully owned that in this latter respect the Wesleyans have not, at any rate till the present generation, shared in the latter feeling, much less in any public expression of it.

The actual state of things having been pourtrayed, the question arises, “Can this state of things be right?” And the further question, “Whether right or wrong, is it desirable?” To these in their order. That absolute unbroken unity is the Christian ideal requires no proof, for it rests on the words of the Saviour, who first founded a society, and then at the most solemn moment of His career breathed an aspiration for its unity. And how that aspiration was understood and acted upon by the Apostles and their immediate successors is amply shown by one significant fact—that for several hundred years the Christian Church *was one*, a cor-

porate, visible, outward unity. What the nature of this unity was will be examined in a subsequent page.\* The fact is enough for the present purpose, and seems to be decisive of the question at issue. It is not here asserted that no division is right. Such a contention would leave no room for the claims of the individual conscience. But surely if unity be the Divine ideal for Christianity, every one who either creates or perpetuates non-unity must be satisfied that he does so on motives or for reasons which make it a matter of conscience to him. Instead of the prevailing tendency to division, the minds of good men should ever be bent on unity. Every man who is outside the Church ought to be quite sure that conscience requires him to be outside ; while upon every maker of a new sect it is incumbent to consider most seriously whether that inward monitor really requires him to take a step which pushes away still farther the restoration of unity to English-speaking Christianity, and still further repudiates the word of the Lord, " That they may be one."

Waiving, however, for a moment, the question of right and wrong, which, after all, each man must solve for himself, is this minute subdivision of religious men desirable? Let us look for a moment at the actual working of it. How injurious it is to the practical energy and efficiency of religion. In a

\* See chap. iii.

small town or a village how often may be seen within a stone's throw of the parish church three, four, or more small buildings due to the zeal of competing sects. Sometimes erected by rich men because they have quarrelled with the rector—oftener put up with the utmost difficulty with the aid of friends from outside, they briskly compete for the support of the handful of parishioners. They are generally in debt, often struggling for existence. They have generally no regular minister, and (in the case of Wesleyan chapels) are usually served in the pulpit by an artisan or a tradesman from a distance. One of them might exist with comfort; the more there are the harder it is to continue. The village is divided into factions. The Dissenters abuse the rector, who in turn preaches against them; different sides are taken in politics, and peace takes her flight for ever from the distracted place. What a waste of energy! Men who should be fighting with evil are fighting with each other. And this divided Christianity makes but poor way against an ungodly society, an unbelieving world. It is not, indeed, likely that men who, plunged in the mental struggles of the day, have not been able to believe in the truth of Christ's religion, will be attracted by the sight of 200 varying forms of that religion between which they must choose. "Nothing doth so much keep men out of the Church, and drive men out of the Church, as

breach of unity. . . The doctor of the Gentiles, the property of whose vocation drew him to have a special care of those without, saith : If an heathen come in and hear you speak with several tongues, will he not say that you are mad ? And certainly it is little better, when atheists and profane persons do hear of so many discordant and contrary opinions in religion. It doth avert them from the Church, and maketh them to sit in the chair of the scorers."\* Will not such an one say—do we not almost give him a right to say—that he will reserve an examination of the claims of religion until its professors are more agreed about it, and will decline to consider whether he shall join a religious society until there is less controversy as to which he ought to join ? To the agnostic outsider there is but little beauty or attractive force in this large group of separate societies. They are so numerous, and some of them so small, that it is hard to say why he should not be at liberty to form another for himself. So he relieves himself with a few bitter jibes at the discords and quarrels of Christian people, and any loveliness he may see in the faith or the ethics of Christianity fades away as the Babel sounds of the sects fall upon his ear.

And what shall we say of the foreign mission fields ? How can we hope for success from isolated conflicting efforts, or expect the non-Christian

\* Bacon's "Essay of Unity in Religion."

natives to understand why this new religion is presented to them in so many forms. Much is said of the want of apparent success in mission work, but far too little attention has been paid to this reason for non-success. If all English missions were working in one form, with one united plan, from one basis, speaking with one clear voice, they could not fail to achieve much more striking results. What a bitter sarcasm upon our wretched divisions, what a pitiful result of a hundred years of sectarianism it was when the Japanese Government recently sent a commission to the United States to inquire and report as to what kind of Christianity was best suited to the wants of the Japanese nation!

There is one quarter where the great variety of religious sects on English soil is viewed with the greatest interest, and produces the most lively satisfaction. The Roman controversialists ever since the Reformation have delighted to dwell on the hopeless division of Protestants as a proof of their error, and as a cardinal argument against them. "Protestants," says one, "hold and proclaim as a right for all the private interpretation of the Bible. This principle—if it were from God—should make them all agree in what they believe and teach; but they are divided by this principle into a great number of denominations opposed in various points of belief one to the other." And then follows a list of 180 denomina-

tions—a sorry piece of reading.\* And in another place, after speaking of the unity of the Roman Church, he proceeds:—"What a contrast between this blessed vision of peace within the Church and the scene of disorder and tumult that oppress you outside! There nearly every pulpit is made the centre of a different teaching, which, delivered without authority, is heard without submission; there sometimes the very foundations of Christianity are upturned, to be shaped anew according to individual bias, or the caprice of an excited assembly, &c."† Such are the commonplaces of a Roman casuist. And it is mournful to think that it is English sectarianism which puts these powerful weapons into his hand. Every new sect in England not only weakens the forces of Protestantism by adding another element of disunion; it also strengthens the power of Romanism by confirming the belief of Romanists that the essential condition of anti-Roman religion is controversy and dispute, and that Protestant lands will ever be peopled by innumerable sects.

In view of these various considerations, what is the duty of every good Englishman? Surely to do anything he can to lessen divisions and promote

\* "Catholic Belief," by the Rev. J. F. Di Bruno, D.D., authorized by Cardinal Manning, pp. 107, 404, 5th edition.

† Ibid. p. 256.

unity. He must inquire whether it is not possible out of these 200 religious bodies to find one which may be a centre to which all desirous of lessening divisions may converge. If such can be found, and the society to which he belongs will not join it as a whole, he must join it individually. He will then have made his contribution, and will have done what he can.

Now the only possible centre of unity which can be found in answer to such inquiries is the national historic Church. She alone has the necessary conditions ; she is the oldest, the largest, the widest, and, what is more to the point, from her all others have at some time past diverged and gone out. To come to her is to return, to retrace the erring steps of the past. Any one who thus returns does his share towards healing the wounds of centuries, he returns, after long absence, to his home. To many, indeed, the ingrained teaching of generations, perhaps of centuries, makes such a return seem difficult and distasteful. Not so with the Wesleyan. For reasons which have been already discussed he is even now prepared to return. The causes which alienated his forefathers have ceased to operate. His desire is now to return, and he is doubly blest that his inclination and his duty point the same way, and that he is able to assure himself that little as it is in his power



to do towards Christian unity, he is doing that little when he decides "I will go back."

There may, however, be an obstacle in his way. The Church is not only national and historic, but she is also established, and the Wesleyan may perhaps be disquieted both in studying the Church's history and viewing her present condition by the fact that in every age she has been in some degree allied with the State, and that in some respects the Government of the country has at all periods exercised some control over her doings. Indeed, many really good men among Nonconformists have regarded this fact as very injurious to her claims. To discuss the subject of Establishment in detail is out of the question here ; it would require volumes rather than pages ; and many works from most able pens are available for the student. Indeed, elaborate discussion is hardly needed to-day. There were times when the very existence of the Church seemed bound up in her alliance with the State ; when to many minds Dis-establishment was equivalent to destruction. Churchmen do not now think thus. They believe that the alliance of the Civil and Religious Authorities confers mutual advantages on both sides ; and that it is well for the nation that it should be preserved. But they never dream that the position or claims of the Church could be in any way affected by a separation.

There is one consideration which may well be put forward to make this latter truth evident. The greater portion of the Anglican Church is *not* established, it is as voluntary as any other religious body. The Scotch, the Irish, the Colonial, and the American Churches are not in any alliance at all with the Government of the countries where they exist, and yet they are one and all in full communion with the Established Church at home, and the difference which exists in their relation to the various Governments under which they live makes no difference in their relation to one another. This is not a pious theory, but a fact. The bishops of these churches have recently met in conference, and their proceedings have been published.\* Of one hundred and forty-five prelates assembled only forty-six belonged to the realm of England, the remainder to the Unestablished Churches. Not the faintest trace of a difference between the two classes can be discerned throughout these proceedings. The bishops met as officials, not of the Crown, but of the Church. No political considerations were so much as mentioned. The bishops from the United States—a country absolutely independent of our rule—simply, as a matter of course, took their seats among the rest. Let us not, then, be told that the Church of England is

\* Encyclical Letter, &c., S.P.C.K., 1888.

an institution of the Government, like the Home Office or the Board of Admiralty. It has never been true, but it was never less true than it is to-day.

The English people may indeed some day be so unwise as to dissolve an alliance which has existed ever since there was a Church in this realm. Well, if they do it can be borne ; it will not make any difference to the Church's position or claims. The Irish Church was disestablished—she lives. The Colonial Churches have been gradually disestablished, but not one has ceased to be. The Scotch Church was for many years not even tolerated. Persecution did not affect her position ; the succession was kept up. Let the inquirer observe, then, that if he recognizes the claims of the Church, and her position as a centre of unity, he need not be troubled at the alliance with the State, which does not, and cannot, affect those claims or impair that position. The Church is national because she has grown up with the nation, and embodied the best and highest elements of the national life. The State never made her, nor can it unmake her.

Nor does it militate against this view that questions involving Church doctrine sometimes are decided by lay tribunals ; for the same is, or may be, the case with regard to every religious body in the country. The Wesleyan student will at once call to

mind the celebrated case of *Dr. Warren*. This gentleman, a Wesleyan minister, having been involved in some internal controversy with regard to the affairs of the Society, had published a pamphlet reflecting upon the conduct of some other ministers. For this offence he was summoned before a "district meeting," and ultimately suspended from his office. Dissatisfied with this decision, he instituted a suit in Chancery, which was tried before Vice-Chancellor Shadwell, and afterwards on appeal before the Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst. Both these learned judges examined the laws and principles of Methodism as applicable to the case, and ultimately gave judgment in favour of the decision of the district meeting. It was not suggested for a moment that the Court had not jurisdiction to go into these matters, although the result of their decision really was to decide whether a Wesleyan minister was, or was not, at liberty to continue to exercise his sacred functions ; and if the decision of the Lord Chancellor had been in his favour, Dr. Warren would, notwithstanding the objection of his brethren, have continued to occupy his pulpit in Manchester.\*

Similar decisions with regard to the affairs of other religious communities are by no means uncom-

\* See Smith's "History of Wesleyan Methodism," iii. 276-322, and appendices K and L.

mon in the records of the Court of Chancery. Any one desirous of pursuing this matter further may refer to the following cases selected from a large number :—

*ATTORNEY-GENERAL v. GOULD.*—2, *Law Times* reports, 494, where the question at issue, and decided by the Court, was whether any persons who had not been baptized by immersion and did not believe the doctrine of limited redemption were to be admitted to the communion in a Baptist chapel.

*COOPER v. GORDON.*—20, *Law Times* reports, 732, where the question was whether the majority of the trustees and congregation could dismiss an Independent minister because they did not approve of his doctrine and preaching.

*DEAN v. BENNETT.*—22, *Law Times* reports, 368, as to the mode of dismissal of a Particular Baptist minister.

The most striking case of this class in recent times is perhaps that of *BROWN v. THE CURÉ OF THE PARISH OF MONTREAL AND OTHERS*, 31, *Law Times* reports, 555, decided by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on appeal from the Canadian Courts in 1875. In this case the Curé and church officers of a Roman Catholic parish in Lower Canada, had refused to give ecclesiastical burial to a parishioner

on the ground that he was a member of a society which had been interdicted by the Bishop. The Court held, after an elaborate examination of the ecclesiastical laws of the Colony, that such refusal was not justified. The main interest, however, of this case arises from the general statement of principle laid down by the judges. After pointing out that the Church in question was in some, if not in all, respects "established," they proceeded to say: "Even if this Church were to be regarded merely as a private and voluntary religious society, resting only upon a consensual basis, courts of justice are still bound, where due complaint is made that a member of the society has been injured as to his rights in any matter of a mixed spiritual and temporal character, to inquire into the laws or rules of the tribunal or authority which has inflicted the alleged injury."

We are now in a position to lay down with clearness the principle upon which these interferences in the affairs of religious societies by civil courts takes place. It may be thus stated: As soon as any religious society possesses any property, the State claims a right to intervene. The doctrines and practices of the society are settled by itself, the State has nothing to do with that; they are then embodied in trust deeds or legal records, and fidelity to them is made the condition of enjoying property or

emolument ; then the functions of the State begin. The tribunals of the country will then at any time assume the duty of seeing that the property is used according to the doctrines and practices so laid down. Upon the complaint of any member of the society, the Courts will examine the trust deed, and compel the minister or other person who has the enjoyment of the property to preach the doctrine, or to conform to the practice, which is laid down in the trust, however much he may object to either. This is the simple principle upon which the most solemn mysteries of any society, Christian or non-Christian, may become the subject of discussion in secular tribunals, distressing as such proceedings often must be to persons who really feel deeply upon the questions dealt with in this manner. It is then the simple truth that every religious society in England which possesses any written charter, and any property, is allied with the State—is *established*.

But the pious Nonconformist will say: "This is not really the objection which I feel ; it is, that your order of public worship is actually embodied in an Act of Parliament ; your very Prayer Book is in a Statute." This is certainly true. The Book of Common Prayer, as at present existing, was approved by the Convocations of Canterbury and York in 1662, and was then annexed to, and authorized by, the Act of

Uniformity.\* It should be noticed, however, that Parliament did not in any sense of the word draw up the Prayer Book, but merely enacted the use of the one prepared by the Church's own Councils, so that to this day any clergyman in possession of any endowment of the Church, enjoys it upon condition of obeying the Act of Uniformity. But other religious societies, calling themselves voluntary, have also their Acts of Uniformity, and can only enjoy the trust property by complying with the doctrine and discipline enjoined by the Statute. Take for example the Act 34 & 35 Victoria, chapter 40, "An Act to alter and regulate the proceedings and powers of the Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Society of Ireland, and for other purposes." This Act (section 4) gives the force of law to a document set out in a Schedule to the Act, and entitled "General Principles." This document is divided into three heads :

1st of Design.

2nd of Doctrine.

3rd of Discipline.

And the principles so laid down are by the Statute compulsory as regards any property belonging to the society, so that if they would alter any point of doctrine or discipline comprised in this scheme, they

\* See the history of this matter in Short's "History of the Church of England," § 749.



will have to go to Parliament. One or two extracts from this document may make the matter clearer. They are from the section

### I. OF DESIGN.

Q. 3. In what point of view then does the Methodist Society consider itself?

A. Not as an independent Church, nor its preachers as independent ministers. . . . .

Q. 4. Does this imply a distinct and separate communion in celebrating the two Christian Ordinances, Baptism and the Lord's Supper?

A. By no means, as the members of the Methodist Society may belong to external visible churches established under different forms. . . . .

Q. 5. Does not the Methodist Society profess to belong to the Church of England?

A. Yes, as a body, for they originally emanated from the Church of England; and the Rev. John Wesley, the venerable founder of the Connection, made a declaration of similar import within less than a year preceding his decease, viz., "I declare once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England; and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it."

One of the Primitive Methodist Ministers, who

chose while occupying one of the chapels, to deny the above propositions, or any other portions of the Design, Doctrine, or Discipline, would be in just the same position as a beneficed clergyman who denied the creeds set out in the Prayer Book. A Court of Law would in either case be bound to pronounce that the person in possession of that property must adhere to the doctrine laid down in the Statute, and he who declined to do so would be ejected. It is quite obvious in both cases that the doctrine and discipline were framed within the religious society, and what Parliament did was to enact that the enjoyment of certain property shall be dependent upon the observance of such doctrine and discipline, in the one case upon the request of the Convocations, in the other case upon the request of the Conference.

This question is certainly much better understood, and the true limits of establishment better grasped, than they were when Coleridge wrote, "Oh! that our clergy did but know and see that their tithes and glebes belong to them as officers and functionaries of the nationality . . . that they are likewise ministers of the Church of Christ, and that their claims and the powers of that Church are no more alienated or affected by their being at the same time the established clergy than they are by the common coinci-

dence of being justices of the peace, or heirs to an estate, or stockholders.”\*

The clergy in Ireland have been taught to know and see these things by a cruel blow, which took away the tithes and glebes and devoted them to secular uses. But this very blow has only made clear to Churchmen all over the world that their powers and claims do not depend on any such accidents of property. Establishment will, therefore, be viewed not as essential but as accidental. If the Church's system can be approved of upon other grounds, no objection can be rationally urged against her claims on the ground of an alliance which, as has been shown, exists more or less between the State and every religious society. Let but the limits of Church and State be rightly defined, let it be observed that the Sovereign may nominate but cannot *make* a bishop ; that Parliament has never, except once or twice in a time of unconstitutional and arbitrary government,† authorized a Prayer Book, or an alteration in one, which has not been prepared by Convocation. It will, then, be clear to the most sensitive conscience that it need not in any way derogate from the position of the Church that with manifest advantages to both parties Church and State

\* “Notes on English Divines,” i. 88.

† As in 1552.

in England have been allied ever since there was an English Church at all.

To the Wesleyan, nay, to every man who loves his country, and his country's past, the national, historic, original Church offers herself as the centre to which the divided religious life of England may converge. Her silent appeal is like that of one of her oldest cathedrals. Reared by pious hands in a dim and distant past, allowed to decay in some ages—restored skilfully or faultily in others—with additions, which have impaired her beauty, built in bad days, and removed not without injury to the structure in others, at last in this our day restored by master builders, anxiously looking to the original plan, and lavishing both wealth and loving skill upon the house of the Lord, so is the Church to-day. She is weather-beaten by the storms of more than a thousand years, but these signs of antiquity are her greatest charm. That which has lasted so long seems to defy the storms of the future. The observer cannot conceive that those chants should ever cease to resound in her aisles which have echoed there for so many centuries. In a day of distracting novelties and noisy conflicting theories, when so many new experiments are being tried all around, this institution, not only old in herself, but asserting the same old and unchanging truths which she has been asserting for 1,200 years,

supplies an element of permanence, stability, and quiet confidence. By her long-continued existence she assures us that amid every form of political and social convulsion, every variety of thought and belief, one thing is permanent and abiding—the religion of Christ.

## CHAPTER III.

The Church in the Second Century—Unity—Episcopacy—The Sacrament.

THE considerations advanced in the last chapter may by many be admitted to be true, but not to be conclusive. It is obvious that a Church may be undoubtedly national, historical, and ancient, and yet be grievously disfigured by faults in faith and practice. Suppose, for instance, a French Protestant to be weighing the claims of the Gallican Church as it exists to-day. The line of investigation we have hitherto pursued would to some extent lead to conclusions favourable to that Church, since she, too, is old and is national, but the inquirer could not rest satisfied at that point. Further observations would reveal that a Church which once professed to be French is now Roman. She who was once national is now ultramontane ; once independent, she has submitted to the usurped rule of an Italian Bishop. She who should be pure and primitive, is full not only of mediæval inventions but of absolutely modern faith, and practises "the newest fashions in religion." A Church which has so grievously erred, and seems

to have no capacity for shaking off error, cannot claim allegiance and shelter herself under the plea that she is old, or national, or venerable. She cannot recall her sons to a home which by her own fault is unfit for them to inhabit.

The Anglican, then, who has proved that his Church is old, must not expect the inquiry to stop there ; still less must he hope to evade the inquiry by an Erastian reliance on her relations with the State, either past or present. Old institutions in England have ceased to gain by age a prescriptive right to exist, unless they can satisfy men that they are based on right principles, and doing good work. And in the whirl and tumult of the religious world, when not only the divine and the scholar but the writer in newspaper and review, and the very novelist, are constantly discussing every phase of Christian thought and practice, the Church must also submit to be examined on her merits. Her claim to men's devotion is daily challenged, and she must take up the challenge daily.

Since her great reformation in the sixteenth century the Church has always been ready and eager to be thus challenged. At that period her efforts were most strenuously directed to regain the pure and primitive character so marred and obscured during the Roman domination. The English Reformers

kept their gaze firmly fixed on the primitive Church. Their aim was not to invent a new thing but to restore the old. They removed with fearless hand that which was Roman and not primitive. They restored with most anxious care that which was primitive and had been lost. They made mistakes, no doubt—it is an accepted Anglican Article that Churches can err and have erred\*—but in the main their work, based on sound principles, need not put them to shame. The reformed Church of England claims without fear an examination of her principles in the fierce light of Scripture and primitive usage.

There will not at the present day be much controversy as to the lines on which such an examination ought to be conducted. A careful study of the New Testament Scriptures will reveal the fact that Church organization, as distinct from doctrine, is nowhere laid down there. There are germs, hints, indications as to what the future course of events would be. What may be gleaned from Scripture is not only quite consistent with, but naturally leads into, the arrangements of the second century ; but in the very nature of things a definite policy for the future could not be in existence in the Apostolic period. The Christian societies then existing were under the immediate personal government of the Apostles, who

\* See Article XIX.



had "the care of all the churches." While under the government of inspired men the churches did not require any constitution—the personal will of the beloved and inspired founder was their law. This state of things was of course temporary and transitional; a time had to come when uninspired men had to take up the government of the churches. These societies had to be under human earthly rulers. Christianity must live henceforth among men not only as a Divine idea, but as a human organism. Like its Divine Master, its Divine life must be lived in an earthly body. Before the end of the first century, St. John, the last of the Apostles, had passed away, the period of Apostolic rule had ceased, and fresh conditions had to prevail. The second century will always be the cardinal period, the golden age for those to study who would rightly consider Christian organization. Then it was that the outward visible framework of Christendom was first reared by men. But they were men who had more than human opportunities and advantages, who were far superior to the men of every other age in one thing. Many men lived far into the second century who had drunk deeply of the teaching and spirit of the Apostles, who had known them, who had been their converts, their helpers, their friends.

When the Apostles had passed away, it cannot be

doubted that their views as to the polity they had begun to frame for the time when they should be gone, were written in thousands of hearts. Can it be any more worthy of doubt that the institutions which the men of the year 100—the friends, the confidants, the successors of the Apostles—built up, were such as the Apostles themselves had indicated and would have approved of? He who breathes such a doubt knows little of the affectionate veneration which has preserved the views and institutions of religious founders for ages. It is now one hundred years since John Wesley died ; but throughout those years what follower of his has desired or dared to interfere with his institutions? His “legal hundred,” his “local preachers’ plan,” his “class meeting,” and, surely most inconvenient of all arrangements, his itinerancy of ministers, still in full measure reflect his mind and the veneration of the men who came after him. Is it credible that the Christians of the second century would establish any institution which did not reflect the views of those inspired men who had done so much for them, and whom they so respected and loved?

The second century will be the period of Christian antiquity most useful for comparison and testing of modern practice. It has not, indeed, been usual, nor is it necessary, to confine the inquiry within such

narrow limits. For so long a period as the Church remained more or less liable to persecution, *i.e.*, until the conversion of Constantine, her history may be profitably used. A persecuted Church was likely to be pure, and the very pressure of persecution would more firmly rivet her allegiance to the great principles left by the Apostles. It was when the smiles of Imperial patronage began to beam upon Christianity that she began to lose her first estate. As soon as toleration was established, worldliness and division soon became rife. The Church tolerated and favoured is not so good an authority as the Church proscribed and persecuted. Although, therefore, the great Anglican writers of the sixteenth century, in their conflict with mediæval Romanism, drew their comparisons from the period including the age of the four great Councils—a period terminating about 451 A.D.\*—their example will not here be followed. In order to gain an idea of primitive practice, it will be wiser to draw our observations, not from a Church established, nor from a Church tolerated, but from a Church not legalized and liable at any moment to fierce outbreaks of persecution and suffering. The practices for which these early Christians were ready to die—and some-

\* See Bright's "Notes on the Canons of the First Four Councils," p. vi.

times did die—may be, if any can be, safe guides as to what is essential in Christianity.

Let us see, then, what salient features in the Christianity of the second century may be perceived, not by the microscopic investigation of the scholar, but, broadly, by whoever will read its records.

The first striking feature of second-century Christianity is its *unity*. The nineteenth century, which boasts so highly of its advanced intelligence, its critical acumen, its progress, may well pause in its assumption of religious superiority when it has realized this fact. If the best minds in our own day are longing and pining for Christian unity, if our Prayer Book phrase which deplors our “unhappy divisions” embodies a wide-felt wish, we ought very humbly to examine a period when what we regard as a distant, unattainable idea was a fact. It is because this primitive period has been overlooked and neglected in the past that we mourn so great a lack of unity now.

The English Reformers did not offend in this respect. The foreign Reformers did, most grievously; Luther, Calvin, Knox, one and all worked on the erroneous methods of constructing *a priori* systems out of their own views of Scripture, disregarding as useless all the precious lessons of Christian antiquity. This is not without relevance to our present subject,

for it is a most curious, though little noticed, fact that a good part of English Dissent has not been of indigenous growth, but introduced from other countries. Thus the sixteenth century Independents and Presbyterians, ancestors of the large Congregational and Unitarian bodies of to-day, derived their principles, and were first trained among the Calvinist Churches of Holland and Geneva,\* while the distinctive tenets of Methodism were struck out by its great founder, not in Oxford, not in Georgia, but among the Moravians of Herrnhutt. The foreign systems were the result of the personal predominance of great men who built up these systems according to their personal views, and whose followers regarded them as almost possessed of infallibility. It was not the least blessing of the English Reformation, as has been well observed,† that it was not presided over by any man of commanding genius. A Calvin would have been fatal. Cranmer and Parker, less gifted with original constructive power, drew their inspiration from the treasures of the past.

Returning from this digression, it will be well to consider a little more closely in what the unity of the primitive Churches consisted. It was a confederation of local Churches without any central

\* Curteis' "Bampton Lectures," No. ii.

† Hook's "Lives of the Archbishops," vol. vi. p. 150.

head or outward bond. No one had any authority over another. Rome, Ephesus, Antioch, Alexandria, Lyons—places such as these each had an independent Church with its own rulers, finances, and local arrangements. And yet each was like every other in salient features; the faith was the same, the Scriptures, the sacraments, the orders were the same throughout. There was perfect union and communion. Every baptized person was a member of the Holy Catholic Church because he was a member of some local Church forming a portion of that grand aggregate. Every man in orders conferred by one Church had his orders recognized by the whole. A Christian travelling from one country to another carried with him letters of commendation \* from his bishop, on production of which he was admitted into the local Church in the place to which he went. This vast organization—reaching from Antioch in the East, as far as Gaul and Britain in the West—was not controlled from any centre; the churches were very far from each other. They were poor; they were despised by society, proscribed by Governments; but they were united by an inward unity; there was only one recognized organized Christian doctrine and practice in the world. In all races, in all climates, in all degrees of civilization, speak-

\* 2 Corinthians, iii. 1; *σὺστατική ἐπιστολή*.

ing various tongues, whether combating Gnostic error or Grecian philosophy, or faithful to death in the Roman amphitheatre—and with some not unimportant differences of opinion and divergencies of practice—there was then an outward visible unity. The Church of the second century was *one*.

But this unity was not the dull uniformity of indifference or stolid ignorance. As has been stated, there were divergencies of opinion and practice. Then, as now, men could not, and did not, think alike. And then, as now, the differences were not upon vital questions, but upon matters which, to those who are not immediately concerned with them, seem but of trivial importance. To take one instance: there was a dispute long agitated between the Eastern and Western Churches as to the correct mode of computing Easter. What is instructive to us is not the matter in dispute, which has long since sunk into oblivion in company with many another extinct controversy, but the way in which it was dealt with. Polycarp—the aged bishop of Smyrna, then a very old man—undertook a toilsome journey to Rome to discuss the matter with Anicetus, bishop of that place. They discussed the matter; neither could convince the other; but their unsettled differences of opinion did not in any way impair their Christian unity. They agreed to differ; they

parted in perfect unity and good will. Before parting they partook of the Holy Communion together, and the Bishop of Rome, although he was in his own church, allowed the Bishop of Smyrna to consecrate the elements.\* We tremble to think what would have happened had such a controversy broken out in any organized Christian community in this nineteenth century, which, though regarding itself as the "heir of all the ages," has yet much to learn from the second. In those early days division was not regarded as a duty, nor the infinite multiplying of rival organizations as a sign of life.

This widespread domain of combined independence and unity had of course an organization. The Kingdom of Heaven required a government like any other. And the form of government was *Episcopacy*. When the second century opened, every Christian Church in the world was governed by bishops, priests, and deacons. Three hundred years of controversy have raged with reference to the nature of the episcopal office; and by constant reiteration the main points of the controversy have become pretty familiar to most people. Yet the plan of this treatise will not allow the subject to be passed over; and the risk must be run of repeating what has been better

\* See Burton's "History of the Christian Church," S.P.C.K., 1871, pp. 190-2.



said by others before, especially by the "judicious" Hooker in the seventeenth century, and the no less judicious Lightfoot\* in the nineteenth. A simple attempt to show how episcopal government gradually succeeded that of the apostles is all that will here be made.

So long as the apostles themselves could personally overlook the affairs of the churches they founded in various parts of the world, the supreme government remained in their hands—nor indeed was it likely that any one would have wished or presumed to undertake the supreme rule in any church whilst an apostle was in a position effectively to control it. The position of one who had "seen the Lord" was admittedly supreme. Under the apostle the government was administered by a board (as we should say) of the ordinary ministers of the church in question, who at this period seem to have been known indifferently as "presbyters" or "overseers" (ἐπισκόποι). This was the first stage of the development.

As churches became numerous and scattered, and imprisonment, persecution, and old age rendered it impossible for the apostles to exercise an effective supervision, they began to select a member of the presbytery in one church or another to be the "over-

\* Essay on the "Christian Ministry" in his *Philippians*, pp. 181-269, 8th edition.

seer" in their absence. Probably while the apostles lived, some at any rate of these appointments were partial and temporary, the bishop being rather a *locum tenens*, than a permanent official, and being subject to the apostle. This was the second stage.

Then one after another of the apostles died, and in every church what had been needed for a time in the temporary absence of the presiding apostle, became permanent when death for ever deprived that church of apostolical superintendence. Many of the first occupants of this developed episcopacy were men who had been actually installed by apostles, and the system was complete and in working order before the death of S. John, who so long survived all the other apostles. This was the third or final stage.

We have in Scripture the case of one church which may be traced through all three stages, and may serve to illustrate what has been said. The Church of Ephesus, founded by S. Paul, occupies a large place in the Acts of the Apostles, and may fairly be taken as typical. We see it in its first stage in the 20th chapter of the Acts, where S. Paul summons the presbytery to take leave of him at Miletus, and in urging upon them faithful performance of their duties reminds them that the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (ἐπισκόπους) of

that church. This is the first stage, an apostle supreme, whether absent or present, and a presbytery.

We turn to the first Epistle to Timothy, and we find him commissioned to represent the apostle at Ephesus. Whether this appointment was temporary or permanent has been much debated, and is of little moment. The point to be observed is the nature of the functions which Timothy is directed to exercise. A study of the 5th chapter of the Epistle reveals him as appointed to perform offices which have ever since been characteristic of the episcopal order, viz., Ordination of Presbyters (v. 22) and Clerical Discipline (vv. 1, 19). This is the second stage. A bishop lifted above the presbytery, and responsible only to the apostle.

Once more the Church of Ephesus comes before us, this time after the death of S. Paul. In the Apocalypse (c. 2), we have the letter written by the Apostle S. John, not as S. Paul had written, to the whole Church in Ephesus, but to an individual who evidently has authority over that Church. The "angel" here clearly means one sent or commissioned, whether it be Timothy still or his successor, we do not know. This is the third stage, the bishop ruling after the apostolic founder of the church is dead.

We can pursue the history of episcopacy in the

Church of Ephesus no further in the pages of Scripture, but in order to complete the subject it will be well to examine the epistle written to the Ephesian Christians by Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in 110,\* or perhaps about forty years after S. John wrote the Apocalypse. In this epistle the then bishop of the Ephesian Church is mentioned by his name, Onesimus (c. 1), and his relations to the presbytery are very plainly marked out in the following passage:—"It will become you to run together according to the will of your bishop, as also ye do. For your famous presbytery (worthy of God) is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp" (c. 4). And the view then current of his office thus expressed: "Whomsoever the master of the house sends to be over his own household, we ought in like manner to receive him as we do him that sent him. It is therefore evident that we ought to look upon the bishop even as we would do upon the Lord himself" (c. 6).

The views thus indicated as to the gradual development of the episcopal office do not claim to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject, nevertheless they may fairly claim not only to be accurate, but to be intelligible, and although we cannot in every

\* See as to this date Bishop Lightfoot's "Ignatius," Introduction. The epistle is set out pp. 21-89, vol. i.

church indicate every stage of progress so plainly, there seems no reason to doubt that what certainly happened at Ephesus did also happen in other churches. Nor does it seem reasonable to doubt that a process which certainly, as far as Asia Minor is concerned, was completed in the lifetime of S. John did also happen at the same time in other portions of the world. The selection of Ephesus as an example may certainly be justified by the fact that it was in that very town that S. John spent the last years of his life.

At the opening of the second century, then, every Christian church was, as a matter of course, under the supreme control of a bishop, and until the opening of the sixteenth century, every Christian church in the world so continued.\* The jurisdiction over the Western churches gradually usurped by the bishop of Rome, must not blind us to the fact that the succession of bishops in these churches went on continuously. It has been, and still is, the policy of the Papacy to depress and keep down the position of diocesan bishops in order to enhance the Roman Supremacy ; but even in the days of Hildebrand, bishops never ceased in the West ; while in the Eastern churches which have never yielded to Rome, the order of bishops has continued without any interval to the present day.

\* See Hooker's " Eccl. Polity," book vii. chap. i.

One other characteristic of the second-century churches will now be alluded to. Their public worship was distinctly *sacramental*. He who attentively peruses the documents of that period cannot fail to be much struck by this fact. A scheme of public worship which mainly consists of hearing sermons was not that of the apostolic or sub-apostolic age. It is an undoubted fact that every Sunday on which these early Christians assembled, they partook of the Eucharistic feast. Nor does there seem any doubt that all partook. In these little, despised, persecuted societies a strong bond was required to hold the members together, and this bond was the Eucharist. These men were in earnest, and probably did not require pressure to induce them to communicate. They had not forgotten that this was the only part of public worship absolutely enjoined by Christ, and would have thought it strange if either a Sunday had passed without a Eucharist, or if any who were present at public worship had failed to join in this part of the service.

We have found in this very slight inquiry that the first uninspired church was *united, episcopal and sacramental*—we have adverted to the fact that it belonged to a period peculiarly entitled to respect and attention—we believe it to be demonstrable from Scripture that the three qualities just enu-

merated are agreeable with the words and practice of Christ and His apostles. It now remains to be considered what is the legitimate deduction to be drawn from all this. Were these characteristics of church life, impressed upon it by apostles and their successors, intended to be perpetual?—ought they to be considered binding upon all Christians in every age? How is a Christian society which has broken away from primitive unity, is not episcopal, or neglects the sacraments, to be thought of? May we, as the manner of some is, treat such a society as outside the pale, as heretic and unchristian, as an early Christian would have regarded an Ebionite or a Gnostic? God forbid! Those who know how freely the Christian virtues have bloomed in such societies will not dare to speak of them as outside the Christian covenant: will not presume to slight or undervalue the work they do for their Master. But, on the other hand, those who, by departing from established usages, or apostolical arrangements, have caused or added to breaches and dissension, have incurred a serious responsibility. Upon them from age to age rests the burden of proving, not only that the original breach was justified, but that the continuance of the breach is justified by existing circumstances. The German and Swiss reformers of the sixteenth century (to use an example) incurred this

responsibility when, in abolishing episcopacy, they broke with an institution of apostolic origin, universal acceptance, and 1,500 years' duration. They may have been right in doing so, but upon their successors, in every generation, rests an ever-recurring necessity of proving that they were. If they are not sure that their precursors were right, what is their position to-day? This question may be asked with special propriety of English Nonconformists. They are face to face with the fact that there exists at their side the ancient Church claiming to possess the characteristics of the first uninspired Church. That this claim is well founded will, it is hoped, be demonstrated in the next chapter. If this demonstration prove sufficient, surely a responsibility rests upon every one outside the pale of the Anglican Church of inquiring why he is outside. Such a one will not be satisfied to say that he has never inquired into the matter, but has remained where his parents happened to place him. More definite reasons than this must such a one produce if he is to satisfy himself that his conscience requires him to continue separate from the church which more than any in Christendom bears the impress of Christian antiquity.



## CHAPTER IV.

The Church of England and the Primitive Church—Unity of Anglican Churches—Its Nature—Episcopacy—Its practical Importance—Sacraments—Unity, not Diversity, the Christian Ideal—Possibilities of Restored Unity.

SOME characteristics of the second-century Church having been dwelt upon in the last chapter, the Church of England must now be examined in the light of these results. It was there found that a striking characteristic of the primitive Church was a unity of visible organization, embracing and including some inward diversity of opinion. Now in this respect the Anglican Church is curiously like her primitive model. The early Church was a union of local and independent churches without a central head—just so is the Anglican Church. Nothing illumines primitive Church history so much as the perception of the fact that “the Church” meant “the churches.” Outwardly they were many, essentially they were one. And nothing helps us to understand so well what this means as an examination of the actual relations of the Anglican Churches today. In the sub-apostolic age, the outward frame of Christendom was a federal republic

without a head. Look at the Anglican Churches to-day, and you see the same idea exemplified. The Churches of England, Scotland, Ireland, of India, Africa, Australia, of the United States and Canada, are in relation to each other what the Churches of Syria, of Asia Minor, of Italy or Gaul were in the second century. They are co-ordinate, equal, and independent. There is no ruling head, no premier church. Canterbury does not seek to rule Cape-town, or York Bombay, any more than in the second century Antioch would dictate to Jerusalem, or Ephesus to Rome. And yet this outward independence enshrines an inward unity. These churches have the same orders, the same sacraments, almost the same Prayer Book, the same creeds—in every respect the same point of view. They have, as the early Christians had, some divergencies of practice and form. It is obvious that things can hardly be quite the same in the diocese of London as in that of the Falkland Islands, yet these divergencies are very little, considering all things. The Church of Ireland has revised the Prayer Book, the Church of Scotland has for centuries had a divergent form of Communion office, but neither of these matters has in any manner affected the unity.

Nor is this unity a pious fiction—a pleasing fancy only. Allusion has already been made to the periodically recurring Pan-Anglican Synods. And not only

was the meeting of the bishops in 1888 characterized by true brotherly feeling and forbearance—"the unity of the spirit"—but in hundreds of churches up and down England the essential oneness of the Anglican Church was daily proved by the presence of bishops from every part of the world where the English tongue has ever penetrated.

As in the early ages, this unity of Church life makes a member of any Anglican Church a member of every other. Any clergyman ordained by any Anglican bishop, is, on proving that fact in the proper way, at once permitted to officiate in any diocese in which he may happen to be. And any baptized layman is at once allowed to participate in Church privileges in any parish, without being required to undergo any examination, or submit to any preliminary ceremony of admission. He is, without further tests, a member of any Anglican Church in the world.

Such were the normal arrangements of Christ's Kingdom for centuries, and such in all human probability might they have continued to this day, had it not been for the unhallowed ambition of the Bishops of Rome. There was nothing constraining in this union, which was at once so voluntary and so real. It left scope for individual and local opinion; it did not exclude divergencies of thought and practice; but when the supremacy of Rome arose,

and she attempted to rule the whole of Christendom, the old freedom began to disappear, and under a specious pretence of union, divisions sprang up. First came the fatal separation of East and West, then for ages the free play of life and thought in the West was crushed out. The diversity of life gradually yielded to a uniformity which threatened death (and European Christianity under the Papacy in the fifteenth century very nearly did expire), and the struggles and agonies which accompanied the Reformation, left the Christian societies of Europe in their present state of hopeless, chaotic division. The primitive idea, the primitive arrangements, had been too long lost and forgotten in the Roman period for the Reformers to grasp them as an ideal. Therefore for the current and ever increasing dissidence and division of Christian men, Rome, and Rome alone, must be held responsible, whose unscriptural, unprimitive, unhallowed supremacy destroyed the true unity which characterized the arrangements of the second century.

The Anglican Church has given, and is giving, the Christian world an example, which proves that even in these latter days this primitive organization is practicable ; and if ever union is to be restored in European Christendom, it will have to be on the Anglican model. Such union will have to begin, not

from a centralized despotism, but from an identity of purpose—it will be federal and voluntary. It will require a consent on some points of faith and practice—*idem sentire de republicâ*—but this consent is far more real and enduring when freely given by communities locally independent, and only bound by respect and love, “the cords of a man,” than when extorted from unwilling minds by decrees of a despot, even if he claims that it is impossible for him to make a mistake.

The Anglican Church does not in any way lose her striking resemblance with that of the second century, because she comprises within herself considerable divergencies of opinion. This state of things is indeed inevitable when the Church’s principles are considered. It will be shown in a subsequent page that she does not apply subjective tests to her members. She wishes to be wide, and all who have been through the steps required for admission are welcome to remain within. But it is not proposed in this place to treat the subject in any light except that of primitive usage. Even in New Testament days, outward unity included great difference of opinion. “One man esteemeth one day above another, another man esteemeth every day alike.” There are the High and Low Churchmen of S. Paul’s day. The Broad Churchman at Corinth could sit at meat in the idol’s

temple, while his more rigid brother was shocked at the sight. The churches of Galatia had a Judaizing party. The Church of Colosse was full of Gnosticism,\* and the Church of Corinth was torn to pieces by the quarrels of three or four parties, whose dissensions by no means yielded to S. Paul's remonstrances, as may be seen by the epistle of S. Clement to that Church, in which he blames them for the very same disturbances and quarrels.† Yes, even in days of persecution, and under apostolic supervision, there were actually organized parties in the Corinthian Church. Judaizing and Gentile Christians, Pauline and Petrine factions, with leaders "withstanding one another to the face," were manifestations of difference of opinion in the first century, as the great Easter controversy was in the second; and church life was robust enough, and the feeling for unity strong enough, to be very little worse by reason of those jarring opinions. If, then, the Anglican Church has schools of thought known as High, or Low, or Broad, and unions or associations with differing views, so had the apostolic and sub-apostolic churches. And in these days as in those, the essential union, outward as well as inward, is not affected by these things.

\* See Mansel's "Lectures on the Gnostic Heresies," lecture iv.

† Clem. Ep. ad Corinth. chap. 47.

Every member of every party is a Churchman first of all, whatever he calls himself in addition. He has been baptized with the same office and confirmed in the same form as his brother of widely differing views. He believes and recites the same creeds with the same fervour. To every Churchman the Prayer Book is his rule of worship. Interpretations of the book may differ, but in every church in England the book is used. The degree and kind of ritual in use may vary, but the book is the foundation of all. The points in which Churchmen differ are as nothing when compared with those in which they coincide.

It is true, indeed, that these divisions and parties may cause bitter feelings and harsh words; as in the Corinthian Church, so now, men too readily assume that theirs is the party "of Christ." Yet these feelings and words are apt to appear and to sound a great deal worse than they are. At diocesan and ruri-decanal meetings, and on other occasions of discussion, adherents of all these parties are wont to meet as excellent friends, and the difference of opinion seems on these occasions almost to fade away in the stronger feeling of a common Churchmanship.

The unity of the Anglican Church has been shown to be in its nature and results of a like character to that of the sub-apostolic Church. It must now be considered whether a similar assertion may be made

with regard to her organization. This is the easiest and plainest part of our inquiry. The English Church is and always has been *episcopal*. Long before Augustine the missionary landed upon the shores of England, Christianity flourished here, and, scanty as are the records of those distant days, they are enough to show that this Christianity was episcopal. At three early councils in the fourth century, those of Arles, Sardica and Rimini, British bishops were present,\* and in the latter in considerable numbers, since it is stated that the British bishops generally refused to receive the allowance from the emperor, while three of them only accepted it. And when Augustine arrived, in 597, he found in the Western parts of England and in Wales the ancient British Church still surviving the persecutions of the heathen Saxons, and having, we are expressly told,† seven bishops. The ancient British and the Roman Christianity thus brought together, divided between them the contest with Saxon heathenism; England, north of the Thames, being mainly Christianized by the native churches, and south of that river by the Roman.‡ And when the two streams of missionary enterprise blended into one English Church, that

\* See Haddon and Stubbs' Documents, &c., vol. i. pp. 7, 8, and 10.

† Bede, book 2, chap. ii.

‡ Mosheim's "History" by Soames, 1845, vol. ii. pp. 64-65.



Church was episcopal. It is true that the lustre of the episcopal office often paled before that of the cardinal or the legate ; and that in the worst days of ignorance and corruption an English See was often conferred upon an Italian clergyman who never saw the diocese from which he drew his revenues. Still, the mediæval Papacy never departed so far from primitive usage as to alter this primitive form of Church government. As a typical case, the great Wolsey, while he was Cardinal, Legate, and Prime Minister, also found time to be Archbishop of York, and withdrew to his diocesan duties after he had found out the vanity of the world of politics and Roman intrigue.

Ever since there was Christianity in England, then, until the latter part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, that Christianity was episcopal. The Reformers, with their eyes fixed on primitive usage, saw no reason to make any alteration in this respect. They abolished those privileges of non-residence, which enabled Roman cardinals to absorb the revenues of English sees ; they required bishops to perform their sacred functions instead of absolutely neglecting them.\* But that was all the reform they thought necessary. They did not think that in Christianity

\* See Latimer, on "non-preaching prelates," in his "Sermon on the Ploughers."

any absolute novelties were likely to be invented which were better than the old arrangements, or, to use the expression of one of the fathers, applied by Bishop Wordsworth,\* that Truth had slumbered in a cave till Calvin appeared. So Episcopacy remained the rule of the English Church, and the Succession from Augustine to the bishops of today has remained absolutely unbroken.

But is there, then, an identity, or even a likeness, between the English bishops of today and those of the apostolic or sub-apostolic age? Are we to compare the Archbishop of Canterbury, with his palaces and his revenues, his grand cathedral, his place in Parliament, with the Bishop of Smyrna, presiding over his handful of poor Jews and wretched slaves, in some secret room in that great and wealthy city, in constant poverty and persecution,† and the arena or the fire always so near? The comparison is certainly startling, and yet the difference is after all accidental, and not essential. For in the Christian polity, riches do not make a bishop, nor does a cathedral. He is a link in a chain, whether he be forged of fine or base metal. And further, in the Anglican churches, bishops may be found divested of all those trappings which to some would appear un-

\* See Bishop Wordsworth's "Church History," vol. i. p. 246.

† See Rev. ii. 8-11.

suited to this sacred office. Our colonial bishops have no temporal state ; they are most of them poor enough ; many have no cathedrals ; some have a log hut for a palace. While for Apostolic zeal, self-denial and willingness to die at his post, no man, even in Apostolic days, could have surpassed the late martyred Bishop of Eastern Africa. Not even Ignatius himself excelled James Hannington in the manner of his death. Nor, while such men are to be found, (and no sooner was Hannington dead than another flew to succeed him at his post,) need we be under any fear that the Anglican Episcopate of the nineteenth century is in anything inferior to that of the second.

But here again it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that, in modern times, antiquity alone will not suffice to preserve an institution from the rude hand of innovation, unless its utility and value be also proved. It must be seen to have been and to be of use, or in this reforming age it will have to go. What, then, may be said to be the special value of episcopal organization ? This: that it ensures continuity of vital truth by providing a regular and unbroken succession of rulers pledged to maintain that truth. This is not hypothesis or mysticism ; it is simply a fact, and is very evident to any one who will examine English Church history. The Church in her 1,200

years of existence has passed through periods of the most widely diverse modes of thought. And in no one of those years has she lost, or even been in danger of losing, those great elementary principles of Christianity enshrined in her creeds. Under all changes of government, intermixtures of race, phases of thought; autonomous in the Saxon period, in bondage to Rome, and full of ignorance, error, and superstition in the mediæval period; in the shock and tumult of the Reformation, and ever since—she has never wavered in her adhesion to these essential truths of Christianity. The organization which passes on the duty of guarding these truths from one commissioned hand to another, and withdraws the commission from him who fails to guard the truth, may not be well adapted for the invention of novelties; it has proved admirably suited for the preservation of verities.

To make this clear, it will be well to look at a series of events which have happened in a religious society in England, which was not Episcopal. There are in the north of England a large number of chapels, which were founded about the period of the Toleration Act of 1690 by Presbyterian Dissenters, descendants of the men of Cromwell's day, *i.e.*, Calvinists, both in faith and organization. The eighteenth century was an age characterized by a

great amount of what was known as "free thought," which, in religious matters, meant a scarcely-veiled Arianism or Unitarianism.\* The influence of the thought of that age upon the English Presbyterians was very marked. When the nineteenth century opened, nearly all their chapels were occupied by Unitarians. Litigation took place, and in one celebrated case—that of *Lady Hewley's Charity*—the highest tribunals of the realm decided that the persons in possession had absolutely no right to the enjoyment of the endowment which had been set apart by the founder for the benefit of Presbyterians. This decision opened out such a vista of possible litigation that the Government of the day procured the passing of an Act,† which in effect provided that the congregation which had been in possession for twenty-five years should be entitled to hold the property without regard to the views of the founder. This statute, which transferred 300 chapels built to propagate the Christian faith, into the hands of persons who do not profess that faith, is eloquent to show what can happen in Christian societies which depend for their stability on Presbyterian Government.‡ Those days of unbelief in the eighteenth

\* See chap. i.

† 7 & 8 Victoria, chap. xlv.

‡ There is a full history of this matter in Hansard, vols. 73 and 74, 1844.

century which shook the faith of these Calvinist communities have left absolutely no trace upon the Anglican Church and her Wesleyan daughter, which latter was, during the whole of that century,\* in full communion with the Mother Church. The waves of thought which shattered the Presbyterian organization broke in vain upon the Episcopal. And in this respect the nineteenth century has repeated the experience of the eighteenth. The case (recent enough to be fresh in the memory of every one) of Mr. Voysey, has conclusively shown that it is not possible for Unitarian opinions to obtain a home in any corner of the Church of England.

It may still be asked what is the essential difference between the government of an Episcopal Church and that of our English Dissenting communities. The answer is, that there is a fundamental difference of idea as to the ministerial office. In an Episcopal Church the idea is like that of a military organization or a monarchical government, the officers are commissioned from above by officials of superior position. In the other communities the commission comes from below, as in a democracy, by the will of the community. In the former no one can be an officiating minister unless he receive *Orders*. The bishop alone can confer these—a congregation may

\* Till 1795.

select a person whom they think eligible for their minister—but he must go to the superior officer for his authority. The community cannot give him that. To obtain this commission he must satisfy the bishop of his allegiance to certain truths, being those on condition of defending which the bishop himself was admitted to Orders—and thus, then, as far as it is humanly possible, it is secured that, from year to year in unbroken continuity, the new ministers are pledged to the defence of the old truths. This is independent of the views which may happen to prevail in his congregation for the moment. His commission is not from them any more than that of an officer in an army is received from the rank and file, and thus the essential beliefs of the Church are not subject to be altered by the fleeting movements of current opinion.

On the other theory, where the ministerial commission is derived from the congregation, the allegiance is also due to them. If they are not satisfied, they will withdraw the commission. In such a case a minister cannot hold to the original or traditional creeds of the society—or even to the standards of doctrine contained in the trust deeds of his chapel—his “form of sound doctrine” is bound in the nature of things to vary with the fluctuating opinion of the majority of his congregation,

or of those church officers who represent them in such matters. The result of this state of things is not far to seek. It is no secret that in a large number of Independent and Baptist chapels, the doctrines preached are so far at variance with those contained in the trust deeds, that by tacit consent these are never referred to. In fact, a leading authority of one of these churches advised the deacons of the chapel to lock up the trust deed in the safe, and never look at it, lest the discrepancy between the doctrines to teach which the chapel was built, and those actually taught there, should be too glaring.\* One is tempted to look again for a moment back to the second-century days of persecution and poverty, and ask whether the Christian Church, organized on the latter theory, would have had strength to conquer a Pagan world. This, however, can only be speculation. The Christianity which did conquer Paganism was officered by bishops—that is a certainty.

There remains only the third head of inquiry, and the results are not doubtful ; there can be no two opinions on the question, whether the Church of England is or is not *sacramental*!. The appeal to the Prayer Book alone will decide this question, not so much whether the Church administers the Sacra-

\* See an article in the *Church Quarterly Review* of April, 1885 : "Dissenting Trust Deed Creeds, and State Control."



ments, but the degree of importance which she attaches to these sacred rites. The Church of England believes in Sacramental grace, dwelling in all her offices upon the fact that these ceremonies alone were "ordained by Christ himself," and teaching that, being so ordained, they must have an importance and an efficacy far beyond any parts of public worship devised by human minds. In the Catechism the young are taught that these rites are "generally necessary to salvation." Each has "an inward and spiritual grace." In the offices for their celebration, their constant use is powerfully urged upon the congregation as a means of grace, and those who neglect them are reproved. The glowing words of the 3rd and 6th chapters of S. John (the Saviour's own words) are transmuted into these offices, and the Gospel accounts of the institution of the Sacraments put in the forefront of them. And the Church's practice corresponds to her theory. On every high festival, Christmas, Easter, Whitsunday, or Saints' Days; on important occasions, as the Ordination of clergy or the Consecration of bishops; even before meetings where the business is partly secular, as of Convocation, or diocesan conferences, the Holy Communion is celebrated. In fact, in a very large number of Anglican churches, the practice of the nineteenth century has come up to the level of the

second, and the Holy Communion is celebrated every Sunday.

And the Church, while enforcing the duty and benefit of this Sacrament, has guarded against its being regarded as an *opus operatum*, or as bestowing, as a spell or charm, some grace, without any conscious action of the recipient. Her solemn preface warns "all men diligently to try and examine themselves" before entering upon so solemn a rite. While the Articles (28 and 29) declare distinctly that unworthy men may eat, and yet not partake, since he only can partake who receives and eats in Faith. If, then, great respect for the Sacraments, and habitual use of them was a characteristic of primitive Christianity, in this respect the Church of England has no reason to fear the comparison with that of the second century. Nor can it be doubted by any one who considers the history of the Church of England, that she is most vigorous and most mighty for good when she is most observant of the great Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The days when this ordinance has been least observed have been the days when the Church's work has been least successful. The mighty revival of church life which began at Oxford fifty years ago, brought out into full light those elements of the Prayer Book which had been overlooked or not sufficiently

estimated, and Churchmen were taught that, important as preaching is in the Christian scheme, the hearing of sermons was not the whole of the primitive idea of Christian worship. The vigorous hearty life of the Anglican churches all over the world, derives its impulse from a sacramental revival. It is not based upon new inventions, but upon old principles. And the men who gave that impulse proclaimed no new discovery, but pointed to the Prayer Book as the warrant and proof of what they taught.

The revived assertion of this strong sacramental element in the Prayer Book has produced a considerable effect not only upon Churchmen, but upon the Wesleyans also, who are far better acquainted with the contents of that book than any other body of English Nonconformists. There is now in Methodism a growing body of opinion, which would place the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a far higher position than it has hitherto occupied. The class meeting, of which in the early days every Methodist was bound to be a member, is rapidly ceasing to be a satisfactory test of membership, as so many ardent Wesleyans decline to attend it.

This being so, the new school would seek to introduce an alternative test of membership, and pronounce every communicant a "Member of Society." If this change takes place, it will certainly effect a

very considerable difference in Methodism, and will make it still more unlike those societies which John Wesley founded, where "meeting in class" was the object of their association, and the Holy Communion was received at the parish church.

This question of the sacramental element in the English Church is specially important when we consider in this light the fact (already touched upon) that Unitarianism can find no home in that Church. It can find no home in any church where the Sacramental doctrine is high. The Church of Rome, with her many errors, has never fallen into this one, nor the Eastern churches, with all their lethargy and ignorance. "That depreciation of the Sacraments has led with general consistency to depreciation of our Lord's Eternal Person, is a simple matter of history. True, there have been and are believers in our Lord's Divinity, who deny the realities of sacramental grace. But experience appears to show that their position is only a transitional one. Many of the most considerable Socinian congregations in England were founded by the Presbyterians who fell away from the Church in the seventeenth century. The pulpit and the chair of Calvin are now filled by men who have, alas! much more in common with the Racovian Catechism than with the positive elements of the theology of the Institutes."\*

\* Liddon's "Bampton Lectures," lecture viii. pp. 726-7.

so in the English Church as long as she holds firmly to that faith in the efficacy of the Sacrament, and that frequency of its use which she shares with the primitive Church, whose martyr bishop on his way to death declared it to be "the medicine of immortality, our antidote that we should not die, but live for ever in Christ Jesus."\*

It may be thought, perhaps, that the sketch of the similarities between primitive and Anglican Christendom, attempted in the foregoing pages, is drawn by the too partial hand of an Anglican. How would the matter present itself to the cold and less prejudiced understanding of an adherent of some other Christian society? Do the facts, rightly interpreted, warrant the conclusions, or has the Anglican coloured them to suit his argument? The best way to satisfy the not unnatural questionings of this sort which may arise in a reader's mind, is to record the experience of a foreigner, and one of the most learned men of the seventeenth century, the celebrated Isaac Casaubon. Brought up in Geneva under the personal influence of Calvin, and thoroughly imbued with the system of that marvellous man, Casaubon went to live in Paris. No less famous by reason of his erudition, than respected for his goodness, his conversion was eagerly striven for by the Church of

\* Ignatius, Ep. to the Ephesians, c. xx.

Rome. King Henry IV. had not long before yielded to similar pressure, and the conquest of the scholar was as eagerly sought as that of the monarch. But Casaubon, in the close and ardent study of many years, had slowly framed in his mind the ideal of a church which should reproduce the primitive Church. Neither Rome nor Geneva could present a reality to correspond to this idea. Weary at last with pressure and persecution, which met him from both parties, he fled to England, and then he was "like some watcher of the skies, when a new planet sweeps into his ken." For in England he found what he had never hoped to see on earth: he saw the ideal Church he had thought out, an existing reality. He perceived the primitive Church, not disfigured by Roman addition, nor distorted by Genevan novelty. He was made a prebendary of S. Paul's by James I., and ended his days in peace in the bosom of the English Church.\*

Such testimony as this, from a man not prejudiced by nationality or early training, is of extraordinary value. An Anglican reasoner, starting from the fact of the existing Church, may indeed be suspected of looking at the evidence with a partial or prejudiced eye, but the foreign observer, first working out his view of the primitive Church, while hesitating

\* See Pattison's "Life of Casaubon," chap. 5.

between Geneva and Rome, and then comparing his finished picture with the existing fabric in England, surely *his* word may be relied on. To those, then, who feel that an Anglican bishop or scholar cannot be trusted as he draws out his parallels between ancient and modern, we commend the testimony of this learned Frenchman, who declined to sell himself for temporal gain, and devoted the whole of his blameless life to the pursuit of truth.

And the Church which received Casaubon has not changed since his day. The Prayer Book has, indeed, received a few slight alterations, and a few changes have taken place in the relations of Church and State, on questions of revenues and jurisdiction, and the like. But the features which attracted him still attract the student who, in whatever branch of Christendom he had been reared, has begun to fix his thoughts on primitive days, and to examine the writings of the Apostles and the fathers of the second century, that he may learn what, on the primitive model, a Church ought to be.

In this and the preceding chapter an attempt has been made, it is hoped with some degree of success, to observe the points of likeness between the churches of the second century and the Anglican churches of today. Some considerations are still necessary to show the true bearings of this comparison.

First, then, it must be observed that the points selected for discussion have been purposely chosen, as those in which there is a difference of opinion between the Church of England and the various dissenting bodies. These latter, one and all, do not in any way believe in, or even desire anything like, a visible unity of Christendom. They are not much accustomed to consider the subject, but, so far as they have a theory upon the matter, it is that *diversity* is the most desirable state of things. They believe that an infinite sub-division of sects, differing from each other on small details, is not a bad thing ; and the fact that division tends to sub-division *ad infinitum* is not to them in the least degree distressing. Again, not desiring such a visible unity, they naturally care nothing for the episcopacy which bound it together, and range through every variety of government, presbyterian or lay, which has seemed good to their founders. And, while mostly retaining the sacraments, they put them very much in the background as compared with other portions of Christian worship. It is for such that we bring forward the undoubted elementary facts of how the men of the second century thought and acted on these matters ; impressing upon them that they not only dissent from the Church of England but from the Church of the



Apostles and of the Apostolic Fathers. Their views are as opposed to those of S. John and Polycarp, and Ignatius, and Justin Martyr, as to those of the bishops of to-day. The points of divergence upon which they insist were not known to primitive practice, but are innovations of the seventeenth century.

Secondly, it becomes apparent that the real point of divergence between the Church of England and nonconformists generally is as to the nature of the society founded by Christ. The opinion of Churchmen in the first, the second, or the nineteenth century may be thus stated: Christ gave the world imperishable Divine truths, but for their propagation He adopted human means. He did what any man does who wishes to spread an opinion. He founded a society—an actual, visible, earthly society. From His words we learn a few ruling ideas as to what the society was to be, and, for the rest, He left it to be worked out, first by inspired, then by uninspired hands. He declared that it was to be based upon the confession of His Deity, and to be entered by baptism, and it was to be *One*. With these, and very few other instructions, He left it to His Apostles to organize, and to their successors to perpetuate until the end of the world this great Society—the Kingdom of God.

His Apostles, informed by His teachings and

animated by His spirit, developed a polity upon the basis of the rich and pregnant principles thus entrusted to them ; and immediately organized into one society (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτῷ) those who were converted by their preaching (τοὺς σοζομένους) in Jerusalem.\* And their method in every other city—Antioch, Corinth, Rome—was the same. S. Paul's uniform order of proceeding, wherever on his missionary travels he broke new ground, was to form a society, even if the number of converts was so small that a private house would hold them all. The way in which these societies were united into one grand society has been already discussed, and need not here be repeated. The notable point to be now observed is, that in the first and second centuries, there were not any recognized Christian societies outside the visible unity erected by the Apostles, upon the basis of their Saviour's words and precepts. Neither the Apostles nor their successors had ever dreamed of such a conception as *orthodox dissenters*, or in theory deemed it possible that persons of like faith with themselves could form independent societies ; such a conception is absolutely modern. The Jewish party in the Galatian societies—the Kephas party in that at Corinth—were within] the Church ; they were not rival or co-ordinate societies

\* Acts, chap. ii.

outside. There were, outside, societies of men who had partially grasped the Christian faith and mingled it with other forms, Greek or Oriental; these were the Gnostics, so severely denounced by S. John under the name of Antichrist. There were the Ebionites, who could not free themselves from Jewish conceptions. Both these sects, answering more or less to the Unitarians of to-day, were, of course, outside the Christian society; but there were no societies which, believing the doctrines of the Christian Church, yet lived outside its unity.

How different, how painfully different, the aspect of English Christianity to-day! The Church militant is thoroughly in earnest, nor ill-equipped for the fight. Her several portions are full of zeal and charity—they have the Christian panoply—the positions to be attacked are well defined and marked out; and yet the successes of this mighty host are not in proportion to the forces employed or the resources they command. And for what reason but this? Their efforts are not concentrated; they fight in detail. They are like the hundred little armies of the Holy Roman Empire—an union of separate forces—compared with the conquering army of France under the first Napoleon.

But to restore the union of the second century! Can any one cherish so distant, so difficult, so

(humanly speaking) impossible an ideal as that? Can any one in his sound senses look upon the two hundred sects in England and expect any other result than that in another century there will be twice as many? Yes, at the risk even of their reputation for sobriety, there are persons who do earnestly and sincerely set such an ideal before them; and perhaps considerations may be urged which may render such a point of view intelligible even to those who cannot share it.

Let it be observed, in the first place, that all ideals which are worth anything as springs of action are distant, lofty, and next to impossible of attainment. Take, as the greatest example of all, the *moral* ideals of mankind. The simple ethics of Christianity are ideals; some of them were precepts of morality declared by Pagan moralists or Hebrew prophets, long before they were summed up in the life and teaching of Christ. They have, in all their beauty, been before the world for two thousand years, and yet, as guiding principles for all mankind, some of them have hardly begun to be fully practised. Even among good men, or societies of good men, who ventures to assert that he has fulfilled these moral ideals, or, at the best, done more than make a poor, lame effort to approach them? Yet who would wish that He, who knows all, had placed on a lower level

the theory of morals He framed for the human race ?

Just the same remarks apply to the ideal we have been considering—the ideal of Christian union—which, it must never be forgotten, was also an ideal left for the perpetual observance of the Christian Church by its Divine founder. The ages have rolled by, and it seems more difficult of attainment every year. So impossible does it appear, that many have ceased to think of it at all. Yet let this sublime ideal be once restored to its rightful place and gazed upon by men, and they will feel its beauty and force. They who have acquiesced in disunion, and even grown to love it, will not refuse the tribute of admiration, even while they condemn the idea as visionary and absurd. Let them gaze a little longer, and all must admit that while Christianity could not, consistently with its unearthly origin, admit a lower moral ideal than perfection, no more could it admit a lower ideal of association than perfect unity.

Nor need it be pointed out how fruitful is a high ideal, how it ever tends to realize itself. The moral ideals of Christianity have never been adequately realized, and yet for two thousand years the best men in the world have been trying to realize them. The high-minded cannot look upon these ennobling visions of moral perfection without aiming and longing to

translate them into facts ; and these longings, these strivings, justify the ideal, and commend the unerring wisdom of Him who framed it. Seeing this, we would once more recall to men's minds the obscured ideal of a united Christendom. We would set before them, not as a picture of the past, but as a hope of the future, an age when these jarring discords shall be blended into harmony, when civil wars shall be exchanged for united action against common enemies. Then all would be ours ; Paul, Apollos, Kephass, the best traits, the special excellences, the tried armour, and proved weapons of every section of Christendom. Then, for the first time among the English-speaking races, it would be seen what a degree of moral advancement Christianity was capable of producing, and (in Goethe's fine words) the insufficient would ripen into fact and the undescribable would be accomplished.\*

If such conceptions could be generally infused into men's minds, if they could be induced to think such a state of things possible, it would become possible. For, what man, having once realized so sublime a conception, could refrain from doing something to bring it nearer ? And if many, although obscure and isolated, were striving for this end at one and the same time, who can tell how great a

\* "Faust," part ii., at the end.

measure of success might crown their efforts? To the Wesleyan, especially, this effort for union should be easy and inviting. His separation from the Church was never a rancorous political *dissent*, but rather a regretful *non-assent*. He is not, like the Lutheran or the Calvinist, pledged to a perpetual separation by the words and acts of his dead founder. The mighty author of Methodism has for the last hundred years been silently signalling to his followers to repair the breach, which, while he lived, he forbade them to make. To them it is possible, if they will, to turn the tide of dissidence, to commence the journey back to the ancestral home, to lead the way from distant settlements back to the dear mother city they have left, but surely never quite ceased to love. Theirs it may be if they will, and if not as a body, yet as individuals, to show that in England at least the ideal of unity is not quite a hopeless one, that we may hope and long and strive that our Jerusalem, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole land, may be builded as a city that is at unity with herself.

## CHAPTER V.

The Doctrines of Methodism—Mr. Wesley's Religious History—Doctrines of Conversion and Assurance—Unsuited to settled Congregations and to the Young—The Church's Methods with Children—Wesleyan Ordinations—Class Meetings—Love Feasts.

AFTER the observations in the preceding chapters, it may be fairly assumed that the Church of England as existing to-day is based upon primitive models ; and, so far as altered circumstances allow it, may challenge comparison with the sub-apostolic Church. But it cannot be said that this consideration alone is sufficient to determine the questions which arise, as between the English Church and the dissenting bodies. The questions which have been discussed, although of very grave moment, have only touched the external part of Church life, they are questions of organization and practice. These are indeed the questions on which controversies have ever turned, especially in England, but they are by no means the only questions on which there are wide and deep divergencies of opinion between Churchmen and Wesleyans. There are questions of *doctrine* in which



the points of view of the two communities are curiously opposed to one another. It surely cannot be a useless or unprofitable task to pass these questions in review. For if restored unity among Christian people is ever to be anything more than a beautiful but fleeting vision, it will be essential that those who are now divided must gain an understanding of each other's position. As then, in considering the existence of Wesleyanism, it was necessary to review its history, it is equally essential to adopt the historical method in examining its fundamental tenet of *conversion*. A historical discussion of this subject will involve two lines of inquiry; a history of Mr. Wesley's religious opinions, and a view of the circumstances under which they were given to the world.

The facts of Mr. Wesley's life are well known, and have been over and over again discussed by biographers, both friendly and hostile, and yet, after all, these facts present a most curious and perplexing enigma. If ever there was a life which from boyhood to extreme old age was that of a saint of God, pure in its guiding principles, apostolic in its benevolent energy, it was that of John Wesley. In his early days at Oxford (the ungodly Oxford of the eighteenth century) the young graduate is full of the tradition of his pious home, he is studying Thomas à Kempis, and Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying."

"Instantly" (he says) "I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words and actions, being thoroughly convinced there was no medium." "It pleased God to give me a settled resolution to be not a nominal but a real Christian." Regardless of ridicule, he forms and conducts a religious society upon the basis of the most scrupulous and anxious avoiding of everything which conscience could not approve. His whole life is religion and good works. He visits the prisons, he preaches, discourses, fasts, nearly kills himself by hard work and self-denial. He is devoted to the Church of England in a way which that age little knows, for he revives her almost forgotten ideals. He communicates once, and fasts twice, a week. Without a thought of self or a touch of worldliness he lives the life of an Apostle.\* What more, asks the bewildered inquirer, does this man require? Has general morality advanced so far that all this is to be accounted nothing? Could the Church of England in that age have produced many such characters, it would have been her golden age, and not a day of languor and depression. It will not, at any rate in our days, be said that this life was not holy, or (with reverence we may add) pleasing to God, because Mr. Wesley was not at that time conscious of having experienced certain emotions.

\* See for all this Southey's "Life of Wesley," chap. ii.

From Oxford he proceeded to Georgia, and he has given his reasons, "to save our souls—to live wholly to the glory of God." The troubles into which he fell in Georgia were entirely caused by his devotion to conscience and duty, not by vice or selfishness, or any other unworthy cause. But it was on the voyage out, and while in Georgia, that he made the acquaintance of the men who afterwards exercised a strong, though very temporary, influence over his mind. It has been already observed that no existing form of English dissent is of indigenous growth. Every variety has been transplanted from foreign soil, and watered by foreign teachers. And Wesleyanism is no exception to the rule. Mr. Wesley became a pupil of a body of German Moravians, and the conclusion he drew from conversing with them was a startling one: "That I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God." Such a conclusion was an obvious one, when he had accepted such premises as these which were formulated by Peter Böhler, his teacher:—(1) When a man has a living faith in Christ, then he is justified ; (2) This living faith is always given in a moment ; (3) And in that moment he has peace with God ; (4) Which he cannot have without knowing that he has it ; (5) And being born of God he sinneth not ; (6) And he cannot have this deliverance from sin

without knowing that he has it.\* But how could any one with any knowledge of religious history, or of the infinite diversities of human nature, ever propound or accept such a scheme as an exhaustive summary of the Christian life? Wesley, however, accepted it. "By him I was clearly convicted of unbelief—of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved."

Brought up in the sober traditions of the English Church, he had not hitherto been in the habit of seeking to gain emotions or to produce feelings. He now set himself to do so. "And so, on Wednesday, May 24th, 1738, about nine o'clock in the evening, at a meeting in Aldersgate Street, Wesley persuaded himself that he too had felt the desired transition, and had passed—from *what, to what?*"†—if we are to believe his own words, from heathenism to Christianity, for shortly after he declared, "till within the last five days, I have never been a Christian"‡—as though a life of self-denial and Christian work, as though prayer and sacraments, were mere badges of heathenism. From what, then, to what? Why, from the English Church, which he always loved, to the Moravians, from whom he solemnly separated *two years after*, when the wave of emotion which threw

\* Southey, chap. v.

† Curteis' "Bampton Lectures," No. vii.

‡ Southey, p. 92.

him in their midst had spent its force and begun to recede. And in his old age he frankly and simply owns that he was wrong in so far as he accepted these Moravian views. "When fifty years ago my brother Charles and I, in the simplicity of our hearts, told the good people of England that unless they knew their sins were forgiven they were under the wrath and curse of God, I marvel they did not stone us."\* And yet all that is distinctive in Wesleyan doctrine, the doctrine of instantaneous conversion for all men, and the system of judging of men by what they say they have felt, springs from this temporary connection of Mr. Wesley with a foreign sect, who exercised for a very short time a very transient influence over his mind †

Methodism was originally a *mission* to the irreligious, and was conducted upon the lines upon which such a mission can alone be successful. The object of missions in every age since the days of the Apostles, has been to effect a radical change in the persons appealed to—a change of life, habits, point of view, mental direction—that change which, from New Testament days to the present age, has been understood by the word *Conversion*. Every religious society in England, from the Church to the Salvation Army, strives in its mission work to effect this result

\* Southey, chap. viii.

† See Curteis' Lecture VII., and the quotations, pp. 362 6.

—to induce those poor heathen who are proceeding in a wrong direction, to change it. Whether this change be sudden or gradual, to effect it is the object of mission work.

And the early Methodists did effect it, did convert men, did induce them to make this tremendous change, and whatever we may think of the kind of theological expression they employed, there was no mistake or doubt as to the results. They won the outcasts who had been outside religious influences, and formed them into a society. But this society became, so to speak, hereditary. For the last hundred years it has contained a large number of persons born of religious parents, baptized, brought up in religious homes, taught and trained to live good lives. Yet to these, her members, the society continues to use the language of a mission, and, to pious and worthy men in family pews, uses the same language as she used one hundred and fifty years ago to the heathen colliers whom Whitfield addressed on Kingswood Common. Upon those whose life is right, whose point of view is correct, and who are striving to move in the right direction, she still urges the necessity of a radical change. Every Sunday evening, the best and worthiest are called upon to be converted, instantaneously converted, consciously converted, and assured that, until they are certain that this has taken place, all their efforts to do right are worse than use-

less. The extravagances of Peter Böhler, adopted for a moment by Mr. Wesley, are the common-places of the Wesleyan pulpit, and all the eloquence and power of which the preachers are capable, are exerted in order to induce good Christian men to experience certain emotions, which are dwelt upon as though to have felt them were necessary to salvation.

To many persons such doctrines are, if not beneficial, yet not in any way harmful. Listened to from childhood, they have become perfectly familiar, and by no means produce the impression which might be expected. Sermons, of which, in Mr. Wesley's day, very usual results would have been hysteria, epilepsy, and raging madness, ecstasies and raptures, despairs and agonies,\* are weekly preached, with very much the same result as those of an ordinary Anglican. But for those sensitive men whose mental nature is not capable of answering to the test, who cannot feel what is demanded of them, and who are told that they must feel it, and that they can if they will, such teaching is most pernicious. If they do not find their way into a Christian society where they shall be freed from the stress of such doctrines, and may learn that instan-

\* See Southey, chap. vii., and, for a contemporary view, Lavington's "Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared," 1754.

taneous conversion and assurance are not, after all, necessary parts of the Christian scheme, they will be in danger of renouncing the Christian faith altogether. With that which is unnecessary, too many such will also renounce what is essential, and, with the Moravian addition, will throw off the Christian substratum. Such cases have too often happened, and will happen again, as long as the Wesleyan, or any other Christian society, makes subjective emotions the tests of piety, and states of mind the portals of the Church.

Especially distressing are the effects of such preaching upon young people. Boys and girls who have naturally good dispositions, and who are ardent and sensitive, really suffer from such a presentation of Christianity. At an impressionable age, from responsible teachers whom they have been taught to respect and revere, they hear a view of religion which makes it a terror rather than a delight to them. Born of good parents, baptized into the Christian family, trained in goodness, full of holy instincts and desires, they are told, when they go to worship their Father in His house, that they are lost, ruined outcasts. There, where they ought to be happy and at home, terrors are heaped upon them. They believe it all—how should they not?—and listen with pained, eager hearts to know what hope



or remedy there may be. They hear conversion preached—salvation from ruin—and the impression of the whole is that they are to experience a change of heart—to feel something. To have felt this is to be converted and saved ; and while the Divine wrath is denounced upon those who have not felt this change of heart, it is also declared that not to experience it is wilful obduracy, since all may if they will. This preaching makes them miserable when they ought to be happy ;—

“ Why should the children of a King  
Go mourning all their days ? ”

They struggle, they agonize in vain to force this feeling, and obtain this emotion of assurance. Often they cannot obtain it. Is this surprising ? Their feet are already set in the way of God's commandments ; their young hearts are turned the right way. Conversion is not for those whose only need is progress. And so in many cases the struggle is in vain, and there is no one to tell these poor children, that what they are striving to gain is only, after all, a requirement of human invention. Such a struggle may last long enough to cloud with gloom those early opening years of the religious life, which ought to be the fairest of all ; but it will not go on indefinitely. A day will come when the boy will find

that the feeling cannot be produced. Then he will begin to doubt the precepts of his teachers, or, sadder still, the love of the Almighty Father, who seems to demand from His children what it is not in their power to give. Such an one has experienced a moral shock, from which it is doubtful whether he may ever recover. The beautiful faith of childhood, the type of religious life which the Saviour taught as the very key to the kingdom of heaven, has fled from him. It will be well for him if, under the wider and gentler teaching of the Church of England, "her sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion,"\* he can recover his balance, and find a true home where his soul can dwell in peace. But there is another alternative. Such shocks are not lightly recovered from, and having once lost faith in that early teaching, which produces so powerful an effect upon the mind, many a young man or woman will have nothing more to do with religion. All forms of Christian teaching will be confounded with the one whose impossible demands have caused so much pain. If such be the issue, who must bear the blame? Surely the teachers, who, teaching human traditions as though they were of Divine authority, make the same appeal to a pure maiden, a good boy, as they would to a mature criminal

\* Keble's Preface to "Christian Year."

steeped in vice, and expect the law of spiritual action to be the same for all.

How differently does the Church of England present religion to the young! Her method is the exact reverse of the one sketched above. Instead of addressing a boy as lost or outcast, he is approached as privileged, a member of a glorious family, a citizen of a sublime kingdom. The Catechism, which is his first introduction to sacred knowledge, informs him that he is in a "state of salvation;" he is "a member of Christ, the child of God, an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." He is privileged, and privilege implies duty. Those great prerogatives involve something—they are to be lived up to.

*Spartam nactus es, hanc exorna.*

And so the teaching, beginning with high lineage and glorious prospects, goes on to express the duties required of the child of the Kingdom. He learns his Creed, his Commandments, his duty to God and his neighbour. But the member may be severed from the body, the child may lose his birthright, the heir may forfeit his inheritance. And so in gracious, kindly, tender words the Christian child is warned, "My good child, know this, that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve Him without His special grace, which thou must learn at all times to call for by

diligent prayer." And when prayer has been taught, he is then instructed that there are other means of grace "given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself," and that, by the mighty aid of prayer and sacraments, he may be able to retain his holy estate, his place in Christ's family, until his life's end. In all this there is no note of terror sounded, no shock to the feelings, no strain on the emotions. The boy is not asked to feel something, but to do and be something; not to gain a place in the Christian family, but to keep it. Religious life is not to be centred in a crisis, but to be lived as an unbroken whole. Change, sudden change, is not demanded, but quiet, gradual progress. Duty to God and neighbour based upon privilege, claimed from grateful hearts, performed through Divine grace—such is the Church's ideal for her children, and thus she would suffer them, and hinder them not, to come to Christ. Their Christian life, beginning on the day of baptism, is to go on without rude breaks or violent shocks; a life of days

"Bound each to each by natural piety."

Well said a Wesleyan minister,\* in writing upon a suggested form of baptismal office, "I will not pray 'O Lord, save this child, *but not just yet.*'" The

\* The Rev. E. J. Robinson.

Church does not regard any as too young to be Christ's children, nor does she put off spiritual birth to so great a distance from the commencement of physical existence.

But although the Church asks no subjective tests from the Christian child, she does expect that her teaching shall produce in him, when grown up, a sense of duty, and provides that he shall very solemnly assume the Christian obligation. While asking no analysis of feelings or description of emotions, she does, once in his life, demand a public profession of faith, a public avowal of obligation. The highest officials of the Church are commissioned to receive these solemn vows ; they are to be made "before the Church"; and everything is done that can be devised, to make the service as impressive as possible. It is designed to be an era in the life of the candidate. And yet the Confirmation office does not suggest or imply any sudden change, any mystical or violent effects ; it is a link in a chain, or a period in a development. This is quite apparent from the bishop's prayer when he says, "Defend, O Lord, this Thy child with Thy heavenly grace, that he may *continue* Thine for ever, and daily *increase* in Thy Holy Spirit more and more." Just as a Roman boy did not begin to live when he put on the manly toga, and became free from guardianship, so Confirmation

indicates a step in a life, not the beginning of a life, as it opens to the candidate every remaining privilege of citizenship in the Christian Society; for it admits him to the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, and upon public worship and Sacrament his religious life is henceforth to be stayed. If this be a true delineation of the Church's method for her young people (speaking of those who grow up within her pale, and leaving mission work out of the question) its attractive features can hardly be denied. It appeals to gratitude and love, not to fear; it makes religion a happy, not a miserable thing. Above all it is a natural method, for it adopts the order which the best parents instinctively adopt; they teach their children duty based on love, obedience through love of the person obeyed.

And the present state of the Church of England is a sufficient proof that these methods rightly followed will produce results. It would be of little consequence upon what beautiful theories the Church reposed, if she were not able to produce practical holiness; but, at the present time, even the most careless observer would not deny her this evidence of sound healthy life. Martyr bishops, like John Coleridge Patteson and James Hannington; missionaries like Selwyn and Sergeant; Apologists like Liddon and Westcott, "agonizing for the faith once

for all delivered to the saints"; preachers like Bishop Carpenter and Dean Hole, moving great congregations of men; parish priests like Lowder in the London Docks; delicate women like Dora Pattison, devoting their lives to the sick poor; these were moulded by the sort of teaching which has been sketched above. And so were a nameless throng of the good unknown to fame; poor clergy working in hard parishes; and men and women in every station in life who give their time, or their money, or their gifts to the service of Christ or His poor. The Church of England may confidently take up the challenge thrown out by Wesley long ago:—

“Ye different sects, who all declare  
‘Lo, here is Christ!’ or ‘Christ is there!’  
Your stronger proofs divinely give,  
And show me where the Christians live.”

But do not the Wesleyans also produce holy lives? Most certainly they do. It is the only bright feature of the divided Christianity of the present day, that no one division has a monopoly of holiness. But what is here sought to be pointed out is just this: that most beautiful Christian lives are daily being produced in the Church, although she knows little of the distinctive doctrines of Wesleyanism. The fundamental difference between the two communions is that the Wesleyan seeks to apply *subjective tests* to

her members ; the Church does not ; because she does not believe it possible to apply them effectually. She remembers what parables her Lord employed to describe the Society He was going to found. The kingdom of heaven was to be a net embracing in its compass both good and bad—a field with wheat and tares growing undistinguishable by any human eye, until One more than human came to judgment. She cannot forget that the Master had a Judas among His intimate friends, and S. Paul a Demas among his. She dare not judge of a man's spiritual life by the words of his mouth, or make membership in her vast society dependent upon avowal of personal emotion, or description of a crisis in the life of the soul. Such avowals and descriptions accordingly are foreign to the Church's system. If a man has entered her portals by the prescribed way, "ordained by Christ Himself," he is entitled to enjoy all her privileges. Unless for notorious wickedness, or openly declared unbelief, she dare not deny him the Lord's Supper, or any other of her ministrations ; believing that only He who reads the heart can or ought to discriminate between the worthy and the unworthy recipient. Nothing is perhaps more distressing to the feelings of a Churchman brought up on these lines, than the confident manner in which the Wesleyan will pronounce



whether such and such a man is or is not a "Christian," as though any human eye could pierce the recesses of another's soul. That any Church privilege should be given or denied to a man by the judgment of his fellows upon his spiritual condition, seems to a Churchman most shocking. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth."

Now from the birth of Wesleyanism till the present day, her system has been to require persons to talk a good deal about their feelings as an absolute requisite to the occupancy of any position, or even to ordinary membership. This system has failed to some extent, as will be shown hereafter, but is still largely in operation. The minister at his *ordination* has to rise up in the presence of a large congregation, and recount that, which surely to most men, it would be an instinct to lock up reverently in the sacred shrine of his own heart—the history of his religious life. In terms suitable to, perhaps borrowed from, Wesley's Moravian period, he must recount his conversion, the workings of the Holy Spirit, his doubts, his fears, his agonies, and the very day, hour and moment when the mystic change supervened. It seems strange that anybody can be induced to go through such an ordeal; stranger that practically the persons affected do not really appear to mind it much. Probably what

strikes an outsider most in regard to this test is its entire inefficacy as such ; for surely it is one which could be quite as easily passed by the veriest hypocrite versed in the appropriate phraseology, as by many a really good young fellow without much gift of utterance. Indeed, with regard to many of the candidates, who have probably led blameless and pious lives from boyhood, it is hard to believe that any sudden crisis can really have happened, which was definite enough to be recounted in words and provided with a date, and there are, no doubt, cases where some unconscious self-deception has had to step in, and assign to a definite period, and clothe in orthodox language, some experiences which would be very differently described by a man brought up on a different theory. No doubt, however, this public declaration seems much more startling to a Churchman, who views it from outside, than to the candidate himself, who has undergone a long course of training in describing his feelings by attendance at the other ordinances, of which we are now to speak.

The *Class Meeting* is also, in theory at least, intended to promote among the members of the Methodist Society a regular course of examination of, and speaking about, the feelings. The "member" is expected either spontaneously, or upon the

questioning of the "leader," weekly to declare the emotions of his heart, the subtle workings of his soul, all that he knows of the hidden springs of action ;

" All thoughts, all passions, all desires,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame " :

and to put all this into words, in the presence of several other persons. Expected, we say, for who can do it? Persons with vivid imagination, and able to express themselves well, may indeed give what is called " a good experience," but who can guarantee his own sincerity under such trying conditions? The whole tendency, in describing experiences so difficult to recall and analyze, so unsuitable to be recounted, will be to exaggeration ; and ordinary emotions of ordinary people will swell in the telling to heights of spiritual rapture, or depths of penitential despair. So it will be with some, but far more will succumb to the tyranny of phrases and well-worn expressions. It is well known to persons who have attended class meetings for years that many members will, week after week, make use of the same form of words, until the constant repetition of it becomes an established usage, and is expected as a matter of course. It has no particular relation to the circumstances of any week, but it meets every occasion. And it is well that it

should be so, as this circumstance, which robs the institution of its meaning, robs it also of much of its danger. And a prudent "leader" would much prefer to receive these stereotyped speeches, to descriptions of emotions and feelings which are only true when uttered by persons of rare ecstatic natures. There is in many very good people a modesty of soul, which shrinks from showing to any other what passes in the recesses of the heart, to whom it is a positive pain that these sacred emotions should be inquired into. Their religion may be deep and real—they can live it—but they cannot talk about it. And the central idea of Methodism, that everybody ought once a week to be able and willing to speak on such matters, makes it an unsuitable environment for such sensitive souls, since it does not recognize that men may feel warmly what they cannot express. A great novelist, and one gifted with deep insight into the human heart, has said, "We must not 'inquire too curiously into motives . . . they are apt to become feeble in the utterance ; the aroma is mixed with the grosser air."\*

Indeed, the newer Methodism has begun to recognize the truth of what has been here stated. It has been compelled by force of circumstances.

\* "Middlemarch," book i. chap. ii.

Every considerable chapel contains a number of persons who *will not go to class*, to whom the very idea of doing so is distasteful. They are often numerous and influential. They are worshippers, communicants, contributors; they are by birth or preference attached to Methodism, but they will not submit to its subjective tests. These persons are not "members" at all, and what to do with them is the great problem of Methodism. If a prediction may be hazarded as to the solution of this problem, it is that sooner or later a change will be made to a different test of membership, and a person will become a member of the Wesleyan Society by some sacramental means, either on baptism as in the Church of England, or by enrolment upon a list of communicants, as in other religious bodies. Be this as it may, the present system of "class-book membership" cannot last very much longer, because it is becoming so incongruous with the actual facts. Much the same state of things is taking place with regard to the *Love Feast*, which was formerly so popular an institution among the Wesleyans. The persons who do not go to class cannot take pleasure in this service, where persons are expected to rise up spontaneously out of the audience and express their personal feelings on matters of religious experience. Many indeed will find it difficult to listen without

distress to these somewhat incoherent discourses, while others, far from finding them conduce to edification, will have difficulty in repressing a smile at some of the extraordinary things uttered by persons who were better to keep silence. The result is that a large proportion of the pewholders in Wesleyan Chapels, often of the Trustees and prominent men, go as little to the Love Feast as they do to the class meeting.

If these things are so, they indicate that a silent but radical change is passing over Methodism, and that the doctrines, of which the distinctive institutions founded by Mr. Wesley are the reflex and the results, are not so universally accepted and held as they were in his day. It was the doctrine of Conversion—Instantaneous—Conscious—for everybody; and the doctrine of Assurance, which led to the class meeting. The latter was a most valuable adjunct of the mission. It kept the converts together and encouraged them to persevere, while the Love Feast, once a quarter, afforded them a field day, when the classes, so to say, held a general review and mutually stimulated each others' courage and endurance. Both were admirably suited for the exigencies of those days, and for mission work at any period. It was, however, shown in a former page that a mode of presenting Christian truth

which is suitable for mission work may be most unsuited to settled and hereditary congregations. The same may be said of the institutions which sprang from the doctrines. No one would venture to assert that the persons who decline to go to class are not, as a body, as good and worthy Christians as any other Wesleyans, and in the practice of Methodism they are not so considered. But it may safely be asserted that such persons, if the matter were clearly laid before them, would not be in sympathy with the doctrines which Mr. Wesley learned from the Moravians, and made the basis of his society. They might not formally disown them—the associations of years will give sanctity to almost any phrase—but they are not to such people the basis of religious life, but immaterial adjuncts to the Christian faith. If such a change is really at work among any considerable number of the adherents of Wesleyanism, if the Moravian doctrines are in any degree retreating into the background, to that extent a faint ray of hope of Christian Re-union in England begins to dawn. For the dullest cannot fail to see what has been demonstrated above, that Wesleyanism is entirely derivative, and that whatever in it was not derived from Herrnhut came from the Church of England. They will remember that Mr. Wesley was an English

clergyman, and, until he fell into Moravian aberrations, a loyal and an ardent one. As their distaste to the German element in Methodism grows they will turn more and more to the Anglican stock on which it was grafted. Liturgy and sacrament will, as they already do in some large town chapels, rise in importance above class meeting and love feast. Gradually the Wesleyan will find himself more and more in sympathy with the Churchman ; he will ask himself what meaning or value there is in separation and disunion ; and a sentiment in favour of reunion will arise, which may have the happiest results for English-speaking Christendom. In the ordered beauty of the Anglican worship, in the intense devotion of the Eucharistic office, the reunited Wesleyan will find more than compensation for the noisy fervour of the class meeting, or the clumsy discourses of the love feast. The venerable traditions of the Church will draw out his reverence, her primitive order will connect his worship with that of a once undivided Christendom ; instead of impromptu prayers he will gain an incomparable liturgy, expressing the Catholic faith not in the language of a German visionary, but in the well tried "form of sound words" which for more than three hundred years has been the most priceless possession of English-speaking men.



## CHAPTER VI.

Extempore Prayers and Liturgies—Prominence of Sermons in Methodist Worship—No Creeds—Too little Scripture Read—Little Place for Music—Advantages of a Liturgy—Prayer Book very Scriptural—History of Liturgical Worship—The Christian Year—Wesleyan Use of the Prayer Book—Consecration.

A WESLEYAN who has, in the way suggested in the last chapter, become somewhat out of harmony with the distinctive elements of Mr. Wesley's teaching, will probably change not a little in his ideals of public worship. There is no point indeed in which there is so marked a distinction between the Church and the Wesleyans as on this one. On almost every possible point of view the differences are fundamental. Of course it cannot be overlooked that some attempt has of late years been made from the Wesleyan side to lessen these differences, by adopting some parts of the Church's scheme for conducting public devotion. Still, it must be admitted that such attempts are exceptional, and do not form a rule, and they may fairly be left out in comparing the two systems. It is proposed, in the following pages, to institute a comparison between

the Wesleyan public service—that of the genuine old-fashioned real Methodists, and that conducted by the Church according to the authorized formularies of her Prayer Book. Or, to put the matter in another way, between the Wesleyan system, which is *extempore*, and the Church system, which is *liturgical*.

Now in order that an extempore service may possess either beauty or force, the preacher who conducts it must possess some special gifts. As the whole service is conducted by himself personally, its effect varies in a direct ratio with his personal endowments. Piety, the most sincere and fervent, will not of itself suffice to make his ministrations attractive and popular. There are men whose extraordinary natural powers have made them pre-eminent as leaders of public worship. Mr. Spurgeon, the late George Dawson, and, among the Wesleyans, Mr. Morley Punshon, are examples of this class of men. Wherever they appear the chapel is crowded. There is an eloquence about their prayers and sermons which is irresistible. And the most impromptu performances of such men will always be useful and successful.

But such men as these must always be exceptions, and below them there are, in the ministerial order, infinite gradations of eloquence, or of want of

eloquence. The number of men who can express themselves even clearly and concisely in public is very limited in any walk of life. The Bar, the profession *par excellence* of oratory, contains a large number of men whom it is a weariness to listen to ; the senate, not a few whose voices will empty the House more effectually than the dinner-bell. Nor does the profession of preachers contain a larger proportion of men whom it is a real pleasure to listen to, who do not fail either in knowledge, or elocution, or taste, or some other necessary quality. Still, to the whole preaching order indiscriminately, the Wesleyan rule commits the whole composition of public worship. What more solemn or awful a task can be imagined than to put into words of suitable reverence the prayers of man to his Maker, and utter them in the ears of a mixed congregation, so that each worshipper may make them his own ? Feeling this, the Catholic Church for nearly fifteen hundred continuous years would not intrust this solemn function to the unaided abilities of the minister, but herself provided the words for her children to use in their public prayers. But the Wesleyan system gives all unreservedly into the hands of the minister. He need not be ordained, he may be a layman given up to a secular calling. He is placed in the pulpit, and to him is given the entire framing of the prayers. His gifts may be apostolic, or he may have none ; he

may have the tongue of Chrysostom, or he may be unable to speak grammatically. It is his business to make public prayer whether he is fit or not, and the people must endure it. The result is, with the least gifted men, the men who never get "a good circuit," or deserve one, often lamentable. Instead of one indifferent sermon the congregation really get two, of which the prayer is one. And sad experience tells how easy it is, while these rambling orisons are going on, for a hearer to lose his attention, and let his thoughts go wandering off in some other direction, and men go their ways, one to his farm and another to his merchandise.

The result of this mode of conducting public prayer by compelling the minister to compose it, whether he is fit or not, has been to make prayer subordinate to preaching, and distort true ideals of worship. To a Wesleyan, public worship means listening to sermons. Ask him on Sunday morning where he is going, he replies "I am going to *hear* Mr. X." If he went to chapel and there were no sermon—a thing which often happens at church—he would be at a loss to know why the door was opened at all. Good preachers are fought for at the Conference, or, if possible, booked long before, and some chapels which cannot get them, languish and fade. Some years ago, in a western suburb of London, the great preacher Punshon was appointed to one of these

chapels which was nearly empty. For the three years of his appointment, the chapel was crowded out whenever he preached, but, when his time had expired, it went back to its normal emptiness. The crowd followed the preacher somewhere else.

Surely an ideal of public worship, which would make it consist mainly of hearing sermons, is not a sound one. It leaves out many elements which from the days of the Jewish Church have been considered essential. In the introduction to Morning and Evening prayer in the Prayer Book, they are thus enumerated :—

Humbly to acknowledge our sins before God.

To render thanks for His benefits.

To set forth His most worthy praise.

To hear His most holy word.

To ask for the things necessary for us.

Where in the Wesleyan office do the people confess, or give thanks, or praise, or pray? The preacher may, if he will, do all on their behalf, but the people themselves do no one of these things.

This is certainly a serious defect in a theory of public worship. It is too much a reflex of the personal mind of the preacher; and the society, Wesleyanism in her corporate capacity, does not speak at all. No formula expresses her mind, her faith, her polity; the preacher states them in his own way. Thus in a Wesleyan service there is no public

recital of any *creed*. This is a most serious omission. From the days of the Apostles, these symbola or battle cries of the Church militant have formed parts of Christian worship. By proclaiming her doctrines the Church stimulated the faith of her members ; while in the Anglican ritual, where they are recited by the congregation, the poorest and the humblest, although he cannot learnedly expound them, may add his mite to the mass of Christian evidence by devoutly repeating them. It is thus from age to age that the stream of Christian tradition flows perennial. There can be no doubt what is the faith of the Church, when it is recited in every service she holds. Had this wholesome practice obtained in the Presbyterian chapels we have referred to,\* could they have imperceptibly drifted into Socinianism? The Wesleyans, however, have abandoned this glorious practice, which is surely rather a privilege than a duty. For after all it is more than a safeguard of orthodoxy, it is a pæan of victory, a song in the house of our pilgrimage. This is why we bid the Christian child rehearse the articles of his belief ; that amid the changes and chances of this mortal life, he may have a firm hold on these tremendous verities, where the facts in the past are the pledges of the future. This privilege, however, the Wesleyan does not give his children,

\* p. 86.

and few of them can repeat a creed at all, or have ever heard one in public or private.

Again, Wesleyanism has no lectionary or authorized scheme for public reading of the *Scriptures*. The personal choice of the preacher comes to the fore, and he selects what Scripture shall be read and what left unread. A more serious matter is that far too small a proportion of the service is composed of Scripture. The usual rule is to read one Scripture lesson in each service, sometimes accompanied by some expository comment. Scripture well read, and Psalms cheerfully sung, are perhaps the most valuable parts of public worship. The Christians in Palestine in the second century used to read at their Sunday service "the records of the Apostles and memoirs of the prophets as long as time permitted"\* before the sermon, an excellent example, and worthy to be followed in the nineteenth century also.

There is in the Wesleyan service no part for the *congregation*; the worshippers are to listen, not to take part. Except in the hymns the preacher's voice is the only one to be heard. In small and unrefined societies indeed, the natural wish of the human heart breaks forth, and those who wish their voice to be heard in the congregation, utter their "Hallelujahs" and "Amens" by way of interruption of the

\* Justin Martyr : First Apology, c. 87.

preacher. This is much better than nothing. Everybody should have his place in a Christian service:—

Servants of the Heavenly King  
*Must* speak His praise abroad.

But the more respectable and polished persons of the Wesleyan body do not like these irregular ejaculations, and their practice is to remain perfectly silent, as no provision is made for them to speak. As was stated above, this is not a right ideal of worship for a Christian society. People want, and it is right they should want, to confess, to pray, to praise, to give thanks, to speak out their beliefs, as well as to listen to instruction. In the worship of the Jews "all the people said Amen and praised Jehovah."\* In the Apocalyptic visions of the heavenly worship, angels, men, all living creatures antiphonally have their part.† Shall we not learn from these sacred examples that a true scheme of public worship comprises a portion for everybody, that the humblest may claim his rightful part, not as in the confusion of the prayer meeting, but in the decent order which befits the public worship of the God who is not of confusion, but of peace?‡

There is one way in which all can bear a part in public worship to their delight and profit, by joining

\* 1 Chron. xvi. 36.    † Rev. v.    ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 33, 39.



in sacred *music*; but there is far too little opportunity to do this in a Wesleyan service. Three hymns and an occasional canticle are not sufficient. Experience has proved the power of music, as a means of calling forth religious emotions, and has shown that this power extends to all ranks of life and degrees of education, and no religious body knows this better than the Wesleyans. Content however with the sublime heritage bequeathed them by Charles Wesley, one of the greatest of the inspired poets of Christendom, they have cared to go no farther, and the cheerful melody of Psalms and canticles and versicles is almost unknown to them. When these are added to hymns, when music, so to say, flows throughout the service, every one's interest is aroused and maintained, because every one can bear his part, and, to children and to the poor especially, the service is bright and attractive. Indeed, of music in which the people can join, there can hardly be too much. All the occasional offices should be made bright with song. The joyful mysteries of the Eucharist, the hallowed festivities of Christian marriage, the solemnities of Christian burial, Ordination, Confirmation, all should be full of suitable music in which all present may take a part; "singing and making melody to the Lord in their hearts." The Puritan austerity which condemned music as wrong, because

it is pleasant, has pretty nearly vanished out of English nonconformity, and Wesleyan chapels often possess fine organs and trained choirs; but there is far too little provided for them to do. With fine handsome chapels, how meagre is the service, and how sadly out of proportion to the architectural surroundings!

The Church of England, in the arrangement of her public services, has been fortunate enough to avoid the defects which have been suggested above, and, as will be shown hereafter, because she has followed the old and Catholic way. Knowing that the gifts of men are various, that her treasure is often in earthen vessels, that it cannot be hoped that her ministry can consist entirely of the learned, the eloquent, and the saintly, she does not commit too much to the discretion of the individual. Conscious that men may be useful ministers though they have no great powers of language, she does not hand over the entire framing of public prayer to the officiating clergyman. She deems this a responsibility too great, even for her most gifted and exalted servants. To all alike, to bishop and to curate, to the gifted orator, and to him who is not gifted, she presents her liturgy. Feeling the truth and importance of the maxim *norma orandi norma credendi*, she writes the truth she teaches in her Prayer Book, and gives it

to her priests. These are the Church's prayers, not the minister's. She is not dependent upon the (perhaps) defective presentation of her truth they might give; the mind of the Church appears when the Prayer Book is used. Not that the personality of the clergyman is excluded. There is left for him the sermon. When he has completed the Church's prayers, then he has his own part to do. Having spoken the Church's mind, he may speak his own. And provided he "prophesy according to the analogy of the faith," he is not in any degree limited in his range, but is as free as the Wesleyan minister in the choice of his topic and the arrangement of his material. All is not stereotyped by the Church, or capriciously devised by the minister; but the system is a happy mean between the two. If, then, a layman goes to a church where the preacher is not learned, or eloquent, or gifted, where he is, in fact, "dull," the service need not be a failure, the worshipper need not feel that he has wasted his time. If he go to a strange church, where the preacher is a man of no reputation, he has no fear of going in vain. He is sure of the Church's part. He knows that, in the public prayers, he will be able to pray and praise in a way which he loves and which will profit him. The prayers, at any rate, will not contain novel doctrines which may shock him, or

expressions which may annoy him ; they will not be like a sermon. " Here is nothing turgid or bombastic on the one hand, or bald and feeble on the other," to use Mr. Wesley's words spoken of his hymn book. And when his worship is completed, and has left its calming, cheering effect upon his mind, he will then perhaps be able to listen to a very indifferent sermon in the spirit recommended by the poet—

God calleth preaching folly. Do not grudge  
To pick out treasures from an earthen pot ;  
The worst speaks something good, if all want sense,  
God takes a text, and preaches patience.\*

Something has already been said of the value of *creeds* in a public service. The man who has repeated one devoutly and thoughtfully has certainly not been to church in vain, if he has heard no sermon at all. Many phrases in the Nicene creed may indeed appeal to the mind with as much force as the most eloquent sermon ever preached. He who reverently affirms his belief in One " who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven," has himself uttered a sermon of the greatest power—it is the very Gospel in miniature. And so of the other clauses in this creed. Each is, or may be, the text of a most powerful sermon spoken in the heart of the worshipper as he utters one after another these

\* George Herbert's " The Church Porch."

transcendent verities. And it is he himself who utters it. "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets,"\* said Moses long ago. Every faithful layman is one who devoutly and from his heart rehearses the Church's creeds and her public prayers.

Further, the worshipper who has listened to the liturgy of the Church of England, has at least enjoyed a very *scriptural* service. If he has been to a "full morning service" and to evensong, it is quite surprising to notice how much Scripture has been read in his ears. It is worth while to set it out here in a summary. There have been read in both services:—

Two Old Testament lessons.

Two New       "       "

The Epistle and Gospel.

One-thirtieth part of the Book of Psalms.

The Ten Commandments.

The opening sentences, and

The offertory sentences ;

and he has also sung or said

Four passages of Scripture in the form of Canticle  
or Psalm.

No Church in Christendom gives its members so much vernacular Scripture ; but this is by no means

\* Numbers xi. 26.

all which is to be said on this subject. The prayers of the Church are full of Scripture ; they are intertwined with its words, they are suffused with its spirit. It is unnecessary here to prove this statement in detail ; any one who cares may easily do so for himself. But it may not be amiss to take one or two examples. For instance, the second collect—"for peace"—in the Morning Prayer has four well-marked allusions to Scripture. They are as follows :—

The author of peace. 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

In knowledge . . . . eternal life. John xvii. 3.

Perfect freedom. John viii. 36. Gal. v. 1.

May not fear . . . . enemies. Psalm cxviii. 6.

In others, very many portions of Scripture are summed up in one vigorous phrase, as in the collect for S. Michael and All Angels Day—"O God, who has constituted and ordained the services of angels and men in a wonderful order." Is it too much to say that there is in this passage and the rest of the collect the teaching of Ps. xxxiv. 7, Ps. xci. 11, Heb. i. 14, Jude i. 9, and other places ? So true it is that the Prayer Book is made up of Scripture. Its beauty, its spirituality, its devotional value arise from this cause. Its value is not from its human compilers, but from the inspired volume from which its

materials were drawn. If Churchmen are sometimes disposed to speak too highly of their beloved book, let this be their excuse. Its glory is reflected, not original, its music an echo of heavenly melodies.

All her brightness, all her glow,  
She borrows from the sun.

No higher praise could be bestowed on any liturgy than this, that it is drawn from the word of God. That word is still, as it was in the days of the Apostles, living and powerful,\* and no prayers built up with human materials could be so well suited for the work of the Church, as those framed from this heaven-given source.

The Church of England, then, presents her members with a liturgy combining these various excellences. It is full of Scripture, replete with sublime confessions of faith, it contains, for the use of the worshipper, praise, thanksgiving, aspiration, confession, prayer; it offers him psalmody, and every opportunity for the use of soul-stirring music, but it has also one other distinguishing merit, without which those mentioned would be far less apparent,—its incomparable beauty of language. We may indeed be thankful that it was compiled in the golden days of English speech, and written in the

\* Heb. iv. 12.

same period as the authorized version of Scripture. Noble without being archaic, with a gravity and reverence suited to its theme, its rich English is one of the most cherished possessions of the English-speaking people. Especially do Churchmen love these familiar hallowed pages, which age cannot wear out, which reiteration does not make tedious, nor familiarity bald. Its happiest phrases lie deep among their treasures of memory, and recall their most hallowed associations. To the sound of these dear words they were confirmed, or married, their blessed dead were laid in God's acre, their children received into Christ's Church. As a man grows older, every pious memory winds itself around these services, and as he hears them again and again, they seem to contain all the mystery and history of his inner life. No church-goer can have failed to notice the peculiar fervour of the responses of the aged, to whom the Prayer Book sums up the religious emotions of a lifetime. On the Church's great days, as on Easter Day in a Cathedral, when the chant or prayer rings down a Gothic nave, it seems to have come from sources more than human. Many a Churchman, not otherwise imaginative or given to talk of his feelings, has on such occasions felt as though he had heard harmonies not earthly, and caught an echo of the song which swells in the New Jerusalem.



Probably very many nonconformists are fully alive to the beauty of the Prayer Book, and would cheerfully admit its value as an aid and guide to devotion. Many would perhaps be glad to make use of it, were it not for a feeling, rather hereditary than personal, which many of them entertain, that there is something wrong in the use of set forms and liturgical books. Being in the habit of studying Scripture without supplementing it with the Christian history of the second century, they find it too violent a transition from the prayers of the Apostles to those of English Churchmen. There are certainly, in the New Testament writers, no distinct indications of the use of any set forms of prayer, except the Lord's Prayer, and perhaps the words of consecration in the Eucharist,\* but on the other hand there is a distinctly liturgical character about the "faithful sayings" quoted in the epistles to Timothy† and Titus,‡ which are most likely taken from sources used in public worship. It would also seem very probable that the "form of sound words" which Timothy§ heard from S. Paul was some sort of formal creed or confession used in public services in the Asiatic Churches. But this is not all. There

\* 1 Cor. xi.

† 1 Timothy i. 15-17 ; iii. 1 ; iv. 9, 10 ; 2 Tim. ii. 11-13.

‡ iii. 8.

§ 2 Tim. i. 13.

are several passages in the works of S. Paul which are obviously quotations, though the source is not stated (as, for example, I. Cor. ii 9), and the industrious research of Christian scholars has traced such passages to their original source in ancient liturgies, which must in those very early days have been used orally, since in their written form they are of much later date.\* These indications suffice at least to show that even in the days of the Apostles, and before some parts of the New Testament were written, there was some element of formal and pre-composed worship in the churches they planted.

But there is now quite clear evidence that forms of prayer were actually used in the Christian Church before the end of the first century. In the document known as the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," which appears to have been written in Palestine in the last quarter of that century† are preserved several prayers used during and after the reception of the Holy Eucharist (Chapters 9 and 10). These forms, by date and style, must have been composed and in regular use before S. John wrote his gospel.

This testimony is both interesting and conclusive, and although, as we ascend into the second and third

\* See Smith's Dict. of Christ. Antiq., Art. "Liturgy."

† See the edition by Canon Spence, p. 159.

centuries, the evidence is but scanty, and there are many obscure points on which we would gladly have more light, there can be no doubt that, from the early epoch just mentioned, liturgical forms were in continuous use in the worship of the Christian Church, especially in the administration of the Sacraments.\* And as soon as a period is reached when the light is fuller, and records are more abundant, namely, the end of the third century, we find the Church possessing and constantly using in her public prayers a complete body of liturgical forms, which it is quite obvious had then been in use for a considerable time, and were well established as a matter of course in Christian worship.† From that period to the Reformation it may safely be asserted that the use of liturgies was the universal practice of Christendom in East and West alike, and probably, had these liturgies been in a language "understood of the people," the most spiritually-minded of the Reformers would not have thought there was anything to be objected to in their use.

In England, from the planting of Christianity, it is quite certain that liturgical worship was universally adopted. But at the time of the

\* See Smith's Dict. Christ. Ant., Arts. "Liturgical Forms and "Liturgies."

† Wordsworth's "Church History," ii. 277, seqq.

Reformation, the forms in use were so unsatisfactory that revision was an absolute necessity. The objections to them will be found well and vigorously expressed in the preface still printed in our Prayer Books, "Concerning the services of the Church." Complex, confused, superstitious, and entirely in Latin, they could not be followed by, or be of spiritual profit to, a congregation. The task of reducing these forms to a service, simple, spiritual, vernacular, must have been one of extreme difficulty. It was resolutely undertaken by Cranmer and his colleagues. The Archbishop's graceful, simple, and nervous English style was a weapon adequate to the occasion, and an English Common Prayer Book was produced which, after some revisions, became the one we now use. The prayers which had been used in England for nearly a thousand years were not discarded, but translated and adapted from the Latin prayer book of Sarum as the basis of our Prayer Book.\* The archbishop judged wisely. Forms, hallowed by being used in the worship of the Church for so long a period, should not be lightly set aside, and new ones composed. And the result of his pious labours is, that many portions of our liturgy, and not the least beautiful, have been in continuous use

\* See Short's "History of the Church of England," §§. 742-4.

in the Church of England for twelve hundred years. They have not lost their savour. Full of Scripture and Catholic truth, they defy the action of time. They will never grow obsolete until the Scriptures themselves are set aside as incompatible with modern thought. How beautiful they become, when they are regarded in the light of this long continuous use! When we use these prayers, which have been used by every generation of our forefathers since England was Christian, we realize the continuity of Christianity, the permanence of the Church of Christ, the Communion of Saints. Can the extempore prayers of any minister, however devout and spiritual they may be, claim to offer such a sanction as this? It is, perhaps, even more remarkable that the portions of the service composed by our Reformers, do not betray, by inequality of style, their later humbler origin. Their age is less, their beauty not inferior. The collects which came from Cranmer's pen do not, in Scriptural allusion, in fulness, in terseness, in taste, fall below those which the same pen transcribed from the Sarum Breviary. He had studied the ancient models till their spirit became his own. Well may Coleridge observe,\* "Our transcendent liturgy remains, like an ancient Greek temple, a monumental proof of the architectural genius of an

\* "Notes on English Divines," vol. ii. 88.

age long departed, when there were giants in the land."

The Prayer Book follows the old and Catholic way in its arrangement of the *Christian year*. By its scheme of Holy Days and Feasts, with their lessons, collects, epistles, gospels, and proper prefaces, harmoniously fitted to their special subjects, every leading fact of the Gospel story and the founding of the Church, leading doctrines and duties, saints and martyrs, have their due commemoration. The coming of the Lord, His birth, temptation, and crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, the Pentecostal gift, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Apostles and Evangelists; finally, the Ministry of the angels, and the faithful departed—each in due order are remembered, and the appropriate instruction drawn forth. Last, as in her daily lectionary the Church takes care that the whole Scriptures are gone through in order, so in her calendar every part of Christian history and experience has its due place. To an ardent, devout Churchman her year is the real year, her great feasts his red letter days, and Easter Day the most bright and joyful of all days. He thankfully accepts her guidance in his devotions, and knows that no fact nor doctrine which ought to be remembered, will be omitted in her order. And he cannot help feeling sorry for his Wesleyan brother

who has not this kindly serviceable order to guide him. No doubt in Wesleyan chapels, in the course of a year, many isolated portions of Christian truth are expounded with fervour and effect ; but a system is wanted which shall insure that no important part is passed over. The Saints' Days, especially the great day of All Saints, of which John Wesley thought so much, are not much remembered, and Advent and Lent are perhaps left out altogether. Further, for want of an authorized office to give a tone to the day, even the great feasts, which are also secular holidays, are strangely transformed ; chapels are opened, or tea-parties held, on Good Friday, and bazaars on Christmas Day. The Churchman does not blame such a use of festal days. S. Paul has forbidden him to judge his fellow Christian who esteems all days alike ; but he is thankful that his Church has taught him to use these great festivals as means of recalling to his mind, by services exultant or sombre, the great facts they were designed to commemorate.

The various excellences of the English liturgy having so well fitted it to be the guide and companion of the spiritual life, while its literary beauties have won the approbation of the whole nation, whether believers or not, it is not surprising that the minds of Wesleyans also turn to it not without

affection. In large and important chapels, it is not now unusual to have some portions of the liturgy read on Sunday morning, not indeed in its integrity, but too often revised and abridged by hands hardly equal to such a task. The offices for Communion, Baptism, Matrimony, and Burial, after being subjected to the same process, are in general use. Indeed, it will probably not be long before an authorized revision is issued by the authorities of Methodism. Whether there is in the Conference, or the persons to whom they will delegate this duty, a sufficient knowledge of liturgical history and practice for such delicate work as revising a national classic, an admitted masterpiece, remains to be seen. Those who love the book as it is, rather tremble at the thought, and feel as Mr. Wesley did when people altered the hymns in his book. "I desire they would not attempt to mend them, for they really are not able to, none of them is able to mend either the sense or the verse." Be this, however, as it may, it cannot but be matter for thankfulness, that whether complete or incomplete, revised, mutilated, in any shape, these sublime forms should gain admission into Wesleyan chapels. The beauty, the spiritual force, cannot be revised out of them. The Wesleyan who becomes familiar with them as the early Wesleyans were, will probably return to their attitude with regard to the



Church. If he does not come back to her, he will not hate or ignore her. He may be a nonconformist, he will not be a dissenter. On nearer acquaintance, suspicion will yield to regard, respect, admiration. Having learnt from his own use of the Prayer Book that forms are not incompatible with fervour, he will cease to say, as Wesleyans too often do say, that the Church has no vital personal religion. When he goes on any casual occasion to Church, he will feel comfortable, and at home, not bewildered by the unfamiliar order. It is not unlikely that he will observe that the familiar service is rendered with more dignity and reverence, perhaps with richer music, than he is accustomed to ; he will feel the joy of thus " worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Whatever may be his future path, that man may henceforth be reckoned as a friend to the Church. There are still many such within Methodism ; they have not as yet rejoined the Church, perhaps they never will, but they " wish her good luck in the name of the Lord."

Such a Wesleyan, nourished on the Prayer Book, will be much impressed as he begins to appreciate the principle of *Consecration*, of which in Methodism he has not heard much. It may be doubted whether this subject is clearly understood by all Churchmen, certainly not by all dissenters. Among too many, Consecration is supposed to mean that the Bishop

professes to impart, to what he blesses, some mystic quality, as though one stone or piece of ground could be holier than another. Surely this is not what is meant by the rite, but rather that wise Catholic practice which forbids what is dedicated to God to be used for any non-sacred purpose. It is His henceforth, and His alone. The building where we worship, the font where we baptize, the altar with its vessels and furniture, the burial-ground which is itself a temple, and the man whom the Church commissions to officiate in these places, are consecrated. They are set apart, absolutely marked off from other places or things, or men, whose uses or whose functions are secular. They are confined to holy uses or holy duties. It is not that the Church supposes that her orders will make a man good who is not good already. Her articles expressly allude to the possibility of a minister at her altar being unworthy,\* but she forbids her clergy to carry on a business, in order, so far as may be, to keep them from secular affairs.

He who the sword of Heaven would bear,  
Should be as holy as severe ;

and should, if possible, have no other duty, at any rate of a secular character.

The Wesleyans think very differently on this subject. Their chapels may be used to hold meetings

\* Art. 26.

(sometimes even political, with their noisy, brawling rabble. Often the space within the communion rails (which are usually in front of the pulpit) is utilized as a platform, and the very table employed by the secretary to do his writing on. Anybody, clergyman or layman, may conduct the service and preach, and in country places most of the services are taken by laymen, who must be more or less mixed up in the secular affairs of these little communities. The contrast between the two ideas is complete.

The Churchman has no difficulty in justifying his theory and his practice. He calls in aid the divinely-appointed order of the old dispensation. The priest, the tabernacle, the altar, everything belonging to divine service in the Jewish Church, was by God's command solemnly consecrated, and set apart for His use alone. It was in these consecrated surroundings that His presence was wont to be made known. The exalted symbolism of these divine arrangements has always commended itself to the Catholic Church. Their period was temporary, and has passed away, but the principle they teach is eternal. Instinctively does the sense of every form of Christianity persist in believing that place to be holy where the Lord meets His people.

Lo, God is here, let us adore,  
And own how dreadful is this place—

is the feeling of Christians in every age. And how can the house of God be better fitted for these hallowed associations, than by excluding those of every other kind? Let mission services be held anywhere in which they may do good; the cottage, the barn, the open air, wherever the gospel may reach the people. But for those who have learnt to worship God, and regard His house as their home, it is surely meet that from that home every influence which may be worldly and degrading may be absolutely shut out, that it may be devoted to heavenly thoughts and heavenly pursuits alone—a very gate of heaven.

## CHAPTER VII.

Uniformity of Wesleyan Teaching—Doctrines of the Sects based upon Opinions of Individuals — Breadth and Liberality in the Church—Her Learning—Tradition and Scripture—The Church and the Canon—Christianity and Modern Thought—Conclusion.

SOMETHING yet remains to be said with regard to the mode of presentation of Christian truth in Wesleyan pulpits. Here once more a wide difference will be found to exist between the practice of Wesleyanism and of the Church of England. Any one who has attended frequently in Wesleyan chapels, can hardly have failed to observe the extraordinary uniformity and rigidity of the modes of thought—nay, even of expression—which prevail among the preachers. A precise accuracy in the definition of doctrines—of those doctrines especially which are characteristic of Methodism—is everywhere the rule. There really seems to be only one way of putting some of the great truths of Christianity. The solemn and difficult doctrine of the *atonement*, that great central mystery of our faith, is the especial subject of this rigid and unvarying mode of treatment. Go where you will, it is always expounded in

the same way. There seems no room for varieties of thought, or for the difficulty which this solemn topic may raise in various minds. If the expression may be used, only one theory is allowed as permissible. So also in regard to the doctrine of *faith*, which, as has already been shown, is one which, in the Methodist system, receives very marked and distinctive treatment. This subject is everywhere treated with those peculiar applications which it first received from Mr. Wesley when under the influence of his Moravian opinions. No allowance is made for the possible case that such a mode of treatment does not commend itself to every Christian thinker. The idea does not seem to occur to Wesleyan teachers that there may be room for other views on these mysterious doctrines. Indeed it is often implied, and sometimes very plainly stated, that, if any of the hearers should fail to agree with the scheme of doctrine laid down, it is the result of wilful perversity, and deliberate shutting of his mind against truth. That any one should not fall in with these narrow doctrines as to faith and conversion, is ascribed to hardness of heart and unwillingness to accept the Gospel. It is not to be supposed that his own reflections on the Scriptures or on divine things can be honestly pleaded, as having led him to different conclusions.

And yet it is quite certain that Christians always

have differed on these points, and a scheme of doctrine has never, even in Apostolic days, been put forward which commanded the entire assent of every member of the Church. The awfulness of these great doctrines, their momentous importance, must lead men to think deeply upon them, and, thinking deeply, to come to different conclusions. And if a man has thought out views on these subjects which are not those distinctive to Methodism, her usefulness to him must soon have an end. A greater degree of breadth and liberality, or a wider mode of treatment, are a necessity for him; he cannot breathe in that confined atmosphere. He does not agree with the premises on which the sermons are built. How can the exhortations edify him? If there were less rigidity he might benefit, and if the definitions were less absolute there would be room for his views.

There must be many among the Wesleyan ministers who would be only too glad if they were allowed a wider range in their expositions of doctrine, so as to be able to adapt their teaching to the needs of their various hearers. The one who said to Bishop Moorhouse,\* "You are happy; your Church does not define 'inspiration' or 'atonement,'" can hardly be singular. To be drilled into so absolute a uniformity

\* Related by the Bishop at the Manchester Diocesan Conference, 1886.

of statement is not good for either ministry or laity. "Thy commandment is exceeding broad," said an Old Testament saint, although the Law under which he lived was one of rigid uniformity and only local validity. How much more truly broad should be the limits of doctrine in a religion essentially spiritual, and which is to meet the needs of every race in the world, and the peculiar wants and temperament of every individual man.

This stiff unbending mode of definition takes its rise from a tendency, which has ever since the Reformation been manifest in the formation of new Protestant societies. The rise of every such society is usually marked by the advent of some leader of unusual force of character, who becomes, in the exaggerated reverence of his followers, a sort of Protestant Pope. Calvin, whose doctrines Mr. Wesley so cordially abhorred,\* is a typical specimen. This great man, unassisted by others, constructed out of his own study of Scripture a complete system of doctrine, which was accepted by his followers as of unquestionable authority, and still lies like a burden on the shoulders of the Presbyterian societies of to-day. His doctrines could hardly be regarded with greater veneration if they were Scripture itself, and in the Scotch churches, even to this day, he is a bold man

\* Southey, chap. xxv.



who dares to say a word against them. And yet they have no authority at all except as the result of Calvin's studies—rigid as they are, and absolutely as they are laid down, they have not the slightest claim upon the allegiance of any Christian man, although they have ruled the minds of thousands.

Such another leader was Wesley, in force of character, in boldness of assertion, in the veneration of his followers. He, too, from his own study of Scripture, and under influences which have already been narrated, laid down his scheme of doctrine, and made effectual dispositions that such, and none other, should be the doctrine of his societies. And so, while large numbers of the English-speaking races still venerate the doctrines of Calvinism, vast numbers no less venerate the Wesleyan doctrines, which are as opposed to them as well may be. If either party be asked to produce their doctrinal standards, they do not appeal to ancient creeds or early and continuous tradition—the one points to the *Institutes*, while the other refers to Mr. Wesley's notes on the New Testament and four volumes of his selected sermons.

These latter are the tests which determine the orthodoxy of the Wesleyan minister. He is not so much required to preach according to the "analogy of the faith" as the analogy of Mr. Wesley's opinions about the faith. No wonder his definitions

are rigid ; he is bound to bring a world-wide religion within the boundaries which encompassed one man's mind one hundred and fifty years ago.

The example set by great religious leaders like Calvin and Wesley has been not a little disastrous to Christian unity. When these men had set the example, others were not slow to follow. Wesley, with the purest motives, the highest aims, yet established the fatal precedent of setting up, out of his own personal views, new systems of doctrine, and making them binding upon his followers. A taste for new fashions in theology was formed in England and America, and soon grew into a passion. Men, who had not his prudent common sense, strove to follow in his footsteps ; every man made a new sect, and impressed upon it a system of Christian theology of his own composition. In Wesley's own lifetime there broke off from his infant society the curious sect named after the Countess of Huntingdon. Later on, men like Warren, who wished to assert their own views, split from the Wesleyan body, and these divided bodies broke again into smaller fragments. The example spread far beyond Methodism. The wild reveries of Edward Irving, the blasphemies of Ludovic Muggleton, the indecencies of Joanna Southcote, each found their devotees, formed a sect, invented a new religion. Every sect, whether exten-

sive, useful, and pious like Wesleyanism, or absurd and mischievous like some of those which have been named, owes its origin to the same tendency which has been vigorously at work ever since Bossuet took the "variations of Protestantism" as his theme; the tendency of original thinkers to set down their own views as the rule of faith to their followers, and bind the societies they form to adopt these views as their rule of faith. This tendency has been followed by the ignorant and profane, as well as by the learned and reverent, and the present lamentable subdivision of Christendom is the result.

Experience proves that in every society formed under the personal influence of one ruling mind, the doctrine preached must be limited, and bound by the system laid down by the founder. To the end of time, Wesleyans will preach Wesleyanism, as Calvinists must preach Calvinism. The results of any effort to widen the boundaries have not been such as to induce imitation. The fate of certain Wesleyan ministers who have propounded new views of doctrine or order is pretty well known, and the experience of Robertson Smith in the Established Church of Scotland confirms the belief that in either society, Arminian or Calvinist, an attempt to treat doctrinal matters with greater breadth than the founder contemplated, will be disastrous to the minister who may undertake it.

Now it cannot be denied that in the pulpits of the Church of England there is to be found a breadth and liberality of treatment, and a wider range of doctrinal exposition than in any other Christian society in England. Her great preachers are not all of the same pattern, and to all her members much more latitude is allowed. There is in her sermons less uniformity in stating doctrines ; more freedom, may it not be added, more originality ? This is obvious, when it is considered that in popular language, some at least of the clergy are said to be divided into "schools," while a considerable number are not identified with any. It is supposed by the enemies of the Church that it is a sort of reproach to her that these schools exist, and that the clergy do not reveal a set of ready-made opinions upon every point of doctrine. On the contrary, the Church glories in the fact. A great ancient national church ought to be able to find room for every mind which can accept her creeds, and profit by her public worship ; ought to find a vocation for every clergyman who can preach those creeds and conduct that worship. Again it must be repeated that such was the rule of the Apostolic churches. The theology of S. Peter and S. Paul and S. James has points of divergence ; there are very marked differences between the doctrine of the Epistles to the Galatians and to the Hebrews. The

sublime theology of S. John is of quite a different "school" to that of any other Apostle. There were four "schools" in the Corinthian Church, two in the Galatian. Surely an Anglican bench of bishops may be permitted to include as many varieties of opinion as the Apostolic band. And the Church of England may well include "schools" of thought, if such were allowed in churches which Apostles founded and presided over.

And it must not be forgotten that the members of each "school" are equally strong Churchmen. Equally do they love the Church, her services, her hallowed associations. They love her not the less because she is broad and comprehensive ; because she has room for those who do not altogether agree with them, and especially because her creeds and her system are ancient and Catholic ; she does not bear the mark of any human founder. The Church is not anybody's "ism." She does not swear by the words of any great divine, or make his works her standard of theology. Her great divines are read, admired, and honoured as they deserve to be. But their opinions are not considered authoritative, or binding upon anybody's conscience.

The result of this freedom in the expression of opinion is that the Church of England is the most

learned Church in Christendom.\* Learning cannot flourish in a society where the results of learning are liable to be frowned upon. Research must have free scope. The Church of England has, ever since the Reformation, been a nursery of sacred learning, and has succeeded in gaining the allegiance of scholars in a way not even approached in any other religious society. In fact (with one or two illustrious exceptions) there are not, in any other denomination, men of the first rank in any branch of divinity. The curious result follows, that in every branch of sacred learning which is critical or apologetic, scholarly as distinct from devotional, as a matter of fact the Church of England provides literature for the whole nation. Whether it be in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, or the Greek of the New, or textual criticism, or church history, or liturgiology, or any form of apology on critical grounds—on these and many other subjects the standard works are produced within the Church of England. That Church attracts the learned ; first, because they are able to investigate with a greater degree of freedom in the announcement of results ; secondly, because the antiquity of her bases itself strongly appeals to men who are engaged in the critical study of the past. What they find in Christian antiquity is in harmony with what

\* See De Quincey's Works, vol. xv. p. 271.

they know in the Church, and a man who knew the second century as Bishop Lightfoot did, could rest happily in the bosom of a Church which breathes an atmosphere so akin to that in which his studious life was spent.

It is certainly not without interest to inquire what feature there is in the Church of England which gives to her divines this freedom of exposition, this range of learning, this boldness in apology ; which makes her the home of the learned, the seat of sacred studies, the buttress of Christian truth against the armies of the aliens. It is the fact that the doctrinal standards of the Church are rather *creeds* than systematic theology. She deals rather with facts than with dogmas. Receiving from antiquity the three creeds, all very ancient, one so old that its origin cannot be traced, she tells her members that these are her standards. They state the facts of Christianity which she teaches, "for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture."\* The assent to these creeds does not rest upon the fact that they were compiled by any great man, it is immaterial who composed them. Their sanction rests rather upon the fact that, ever since there has been a Church of England, they have been taught and held. A succession of bishops, a perhaps still

\* Article VIII.

more convincing succession of faithful members of the Church, have handed them on without interruption or break. If on such authority, Scripture and tradition, they can be accepted, they are the Churchman's rule of faith and standard of doctrine.

Beyond the creeds, the Church definitely assigns men to the Scriptures as the true source of doctrine. "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, or may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith,"\* "besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation."† That is the Church's claim, that her doctrines, like her creeds, can be proved by Scripture. The Church does not send men to human compilations; if men cannot accept doctrines on authority alone, they are to go to the Scriptures and test them. She makes this challenge with the utmost confidence, knowing that at the Reformation her formulas were rigorously revised by comparing them with the Bible, and fearlessly cutting away all unscriptural elements which had crept in. Any tradition she now possesses cannot be out of harmony with Scripture, or it would not have remained. Ancient creeds, primitive tradi-

\* Article VI.

† Article XX.



tion, unfettered study of Scripture—such are the credentials the Church offers to those who would know her warrant as a teacher.

“In brief, where the Scripture is silent the Church is my text ; where that speaks ’tis but my comment ; where there is a joint silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my religion from Rome or Geneva, but from the dictates of my own reason.”\* Such has been the attitude of mind of thousands of the most learned of Englishmen, who have been able to combine the utmost freedom in study with devout loyalty to the Church. And these are the men who day by day guard the outposts of Christian truth, while Churchman and Dissenter sit at rest each under his own vine and fig-tree, secure in the protection of these champions of the faith.

It is obvious that the Church of England has never endorsed that curious fallacy first propounded, we believe, by Chillingworth, and very common in the mouths of nonconformists, that “The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.” This statement, when used by a member of any particular sect, is supposed to mean that with regard to the society to which he belongs, every doctrine and practice of that society has been framed from a study of Scripture alone, without any assistance

\* Browne’s “Religio Medici,” sect. 5.

from tradition. It really means, however, that they are the result of the study in Scripture of some man or set of men, implicitly received by the rest of the society. Even then it is not true, as the compiler of the system himself could not, if he tried, shake himself entirely free from the doctrinal prepossessions in which he was nurtured.

If we examine this statement with regard to Wesleyanism, this becomes very apparent. The Bible to a Wesleyan means the Authorized Version. It also means Wesley's notes on the New Testament. But as Wesley in his preface to this work states that his notes are principally taken from Bengel, it also includes "Bengel's Gnomon." We may further note that Wesley was all his life a firm believer in a large portion of the doctrine of the Church of England, and Bengel was an adherent of the Lutheran; of the traditions therefore of these two churches, some portion must have been present at the formation of Wesleyanism. There is much more than "the Bible only" here. It will also be apparent that systems which profess to be formed upon "the Bible only" may be widely divergent. Mr. Wesley believed Calvinism to be full of pernicious error. Yet it too was deduced from the Scriptures by its great founder. Who is to arbitrate between two systems which both profess to be deduced immediately from the Word of God?

This last difficulty is insuperable, and is sufficient to show the wisdom of the Church of England in never making such a claim : "When I can bring myself to believe that from the mere perusal of the New Testament a man might have sketched out by anticipation the constitution, discipline, creeds, and sacramental ritual of the Episcopal Reformed Church of England ; or that it is not a true and orthodox church because this is incredible ; then I may perhaps be inclined to echo Chillingworth."\*

What the Church does is this. Finding herself in possession of a creed, a doctrine, or an organization known to be ancient, believed to be good, she refers to Scripture. If what is read there be not repugnant to the ancient tradition which has handed down the doctrine or the usage, she retains it. What is contrary to Scripture must not be retained, what is not concluded by Scripture, but justified by the practice of primitive times, the Church approves of. But we hope the time is far distant when that Church will take as articles of belief any novelties of doctrine, even though bearing the names of illustrious divines, or professing to be drawn from the Bible itself. "The old is better."

The position taken up by the Church of England on this subject will become clearer by consideration

\* Coleridge's "Notes on English Divines," ii. 308.

of the circumstance, that there was a period in the history of Christianity when there was a Church, but no Bible in our sense of the word—that is, there was no New Testament. This period certainly lasted as long as did the ministry of the Apostles, and probably longer, certainly till the end of the first century. The Church, during this period, had a Bible, but that Bible was the Old Testament. When our Saviour bade the Jews “search the Scriptures,” when Timothy was commended for his knowledge of them, when S. Paul says that “every Scripture is divinely inspired,” there was no New Testament in existence.

Nor was there any when the Apostles were founding and organizing Christian churches. Their preaching was based upon the great cardinal facts of the life of Christ. These they constantly recounted, not from any written books, but from oral statements. They had “seen the Lord,” and they “testified what they had seen.” They used, in accordance with the habits of Eastern races, set and oral forms of narration, which, however, were not written down, but spoken by heart, and which in all probability are still to be found in those portions of the narrative of Christ’s life and death, which are common to the three synoptic evangelists.\*

Now, this was the period in which the great

\* See Westcott on the Gospels, pp. 164–180.

distinctive doctrines of Christianity were being formulated. It is not to be supposed that S. John, in his gospel and epistles, proclaimed new and unheard-of truths about our Lord's nature and claims. He was laying down, and defending against error, doctrines which were held in all the churches and had been taught by all the Apostles. The Church had these doctrines before a line of the gospel was penned. They had been developed orally. It was in this period also that all the leading external features of the Christian Church were framed. The sacraments, the episcopal order, the Lord's day, germs of creeds and liturgies, all owe their origin to this period. They were not evolved from any written document. The Apostles, prophets, and evangelists of these early days built up the practice of the Church, as they built up its doctrines, by oral instruction.

Gradually, as the Apostolic band faded away, their writings began to take their place ; but they were not at once placed in the canon as on an equality with the scriptures of the Old Testament. Large numbers of other books were in circulation. Those lives of our Lord mentioned by S. Luke in the preface to his gospel, which he declared to be incorrect, because written by persons who had not the necessary knowledge ; and books which, like the Shepherd of

Hermas, the epistle of Barnabas, and the epistle of Clement, were read in the churches, and are still to be found bound up with very ancient Greek copies of the Bible. At the same time, a feeling was growing up that there were writings of the new covenant, which were worthy of equal reverence with those of the old. Who was to decide what Christian writings were to be admitted into the Bible?

The Church, then happily undivided, was strong enough for this momentous task. But the growth of "spiritual consciousness" on this subject was very slow, the process of distinguishing between books very gradual. It is impossible to say when the opinion first arose that any distinction ought to be drawn. Probably in the long period which elapsed between the death of S. John and the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363) the process was going on very slowly, and yet really. The superiority of the Apostolic books became more and more felt. The fact of their authorship made a stronger impression; doubts about particular books disappeared. Book after book, which had once had a reputation, was felt to be unworthy to associate with S. Paul and S. John, and fell into a lower class. Christendom became unanimous on the question, and was ready to enact, at the Council, decrees which, for the first time, fixed the canon of Old and New Testaments, and

forbade any non-canonical books to be read in the church.\*

The position of the Christian Church, when she at last found herself in possession of an authorized canonical New Testament, was exactly the position which the Church of England takes up to-day. The Church is the "witness and keeper of holy writ,"† and her first duty is to define what books she deems Scripture.‡ This done, they are the test of her doctrines, order, creeds, traditions; and are more precious, more essential than all—the touchstone, the proof of all. But the Church never framed these things from Scripture. Some existed before New Testament Scripture was written—nearly all before the canon was fixed. They descend by a tradition of continuous use from Apostolic or sub-Apostolic days.

So, then, it is not "the Bible only," nor yet the Church only, which is the religion of the Reformed Church of England. They are "double one against another"; they mutually depend on each other; they mutually support each other; they need each other in order to be verily themselves. The Bible requires the support of the Church—the Church the witness of the Bible. The Church authenticates the books, the books justify the Church. In a great scheme of

\* See Davidson on the Canon, chaps. 6 and 7.

† Article XX.

‡ Article VI.

Christian evidence both bear testimony. The internal evidence of books, the external evidence of the society, corroborate each other. Nay more, the good nonconformists who love the word of God so well, ought, did they reflect on it, to be heartily thankful to that great society, which, spite of failings and weaknesses and errors, has guarded the Bible for twelve hundred years, and hands it on, uncorrupted and safe, to every English Christian to-day.

It is of great importance with regard to breadth and liberality in study that the Church of England has laid down no authorized rule or theory for the interpretation of Scripture. As already observed, there is no theory of inspiration, and especially no attempt to enforce that idea of verbal and literal inspiration, which shuts out, as impious, any exercise of scholarship, either upon text, translation, or critical commentary. "Search the Scriptures," said our Lord, and so says the Church. Nor does she limit the manner of the search, because she is not afraid of the result. The more men study the Scriptures with every appliance and resource of modern learning, the better it will be. So, one band of scholars devote their lives to the textual criticism of Hebrew or Greek books—others re-translate, as the nicest accuracy of classical scholarship may help them. Others again, with materials old and new, write commentaries, or eluci-



date from profane authors and modern discoveries. Such work could not be done to any profit by men who were afraid of uttering new and perhaps startling views, or results opposed to current theories. Critical study of any ancient writings, whether sacred or profane, must be free, if it is to be any good at all. Men must not be afraid to look, if they would see wondrous things out of God's law. They must be content to be surprised sometimes, and to surprise others. The Church of England has happily in every age possessed scholars at once bold and reverent, freely scanning the Word of God, and daring to use freely the methods of scholarship ; never fearing that He who inspired the sacred page can preserve what He wrote, and never losing, while analyzing and discussing the letter of Scripture, the divine light of its spiritual meaning.

If ever this mode of studying the Scriptures, this study, at once free and reverent, was desirable and essential to the Church's wellbeing, it is doubly so to-day. Both in England and Germany, for the last fifty years, there has been an enormous amount of study devoted to the sacred Word by men of immense learning, but very little reverence. The object of much of this research, especially in Germany, has seemed to be to degrade, and attack the Bible, not reverently to elucidate it. It is the work of

enemies, and not friends. Geological science opened the batteries against the book of Genesis. The Tübingen School endeavoured to undermine the genuineness of many books of the New Testament, while a large volume would be required even to summarize the immense mass and variety of discussions, which, from Ewald down to Wellhausen,\* whose star just now seems in the ascendant, have raged around all the books of the Old Testament. These are only instances of many sides on which received views as to the Scriptures are being assailed with great skill and erudition. Nor can it be denied that, on the whole, literary Germany, Protestant, Lutheran Germany, has been content to accept the results of these studies and researches, and that to some extent English scholars have seen views in them which are felt to be worthy of acceptance. These discussions have reached a point where they must be faced in some form or other ; they cannot be ignored. How are the Christian churches of England going to deal with them ?

Suppose, for instance, it be asserted (and probably every Hebrew scholar in Germany would assert) that the book of Isaiah is not the work of one author, but of two—the first part being written by Isaiah of

\* A specimen of his work may be seen in the Enc. Brit., Art. "Israel."

Jerusalem, and the second by a great unnamed Prophet, who lived during the Babylonish captivity. This view has been arrived at on critical grounds by close study. It is opposed to the opinion which has hitherto prevailed. How is the Christian scholar to deal with it? He may of course at once dismiss it as derogatory to his own views as to the inspiration of Scripture. He may decline to discuss or entertain it, as an impious attack on religion. And if his religion is based on the axiom of "the Bible only," which has been alluded to, he is almost bound to shut his ears to critical discussions which, if they prevail to even a very small degree, may rob him of the foundation of his faith, and leave him without any external support, for the truths which are so dear to him. He must not hear what they have to say, for fear there might appear to be some truth in them. His only safe course is that embodied in the lines:—

I'd call them vanity and lies,  
And bind Thy gospel to my heart.

If any Christian scholar or society decides on this momentous question to take such a line, the consequences must be faced. The society which does so, has broken with the learning and intellect of the country. In declining to know what scholarship is doing, she will make her pulpit unattractive to

learned men ; her pews no place for scholarly hearers. And she will do much to hasten the crisis which Milman\* feared a quarter of a century ago, and which is by no means past : " If on such subjects some ground be not found on which highly educated, reflective, reading, reasoning men may find firm footing, I can foresee nothing but a wide, a widening, I fear an irreparable breach between the thought and the religion of England."

If such ground can be found, if the results of critical, and often irreverent, inquiry upon Biblical questions are to be faced, examined and considered ; if an attempt is to be made to establish a *modus vivendi* between critical thought and Christian faith, who are so well equipped for the task as the divines of the Church of England ? Her faith is not so constructed that the erasure of a text of Scripture or an alteration of a rendering will shatter its foundation, or hurl it to the ground. She traces it by continuous tradition to the days of the Apostles. She has daily recited it in England for twelve hundred years. How can new critical standpoints affect this venerable historic structure ? Her statements as to Scripture will not limit the province of the inquirer. She is wedded to no theory, committed to no text, bound to no version, confined to no commentary. The Church does not fear the

\* " History of the Jews," 3rd edition, 1863. Pref. p. xxxiv.

result of any amount of critical discussion. A good deal of what has been laboriously evolved will not stand examination ; it will perish. If any portion seem to be true, and yet to conflict with views hitherto held by the Church, she will not be dismayed, for she has weathered worse storms than this—

*Si fractus illabitur orbis,  
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.*

Already her scholars have entered upon this path of calm, confident examination of the new German criticism with regard to the Old Testament, and have shown that there exists in these recent researches nothing which need terrify the believer or imperil his faith. They are even now showing to Christendom their confidence in Scripture, as the living revelation of God to the Church of every age, by proving a willingness to consider everything from every quarter, and with whatever motive written, which may shed a light on Scripture, or, if need be, adapt the traditional views of one age to the intellectual needs of another. Thus declaring their firm faith, which may surely be ours also, that He who inspired human pens to write His Word, and human means to spread it through the world, will bless any effort of devout though fallible men to make that Word useful and acceptable to the age and the society in which they live, and cannot but look with

favour upon those instructed scribes who bring out of this treasury of perfect wisdom things new as well as things old.

The Wesleyan, then, who would desire to extend a generous sympathy rather than a cold indifference to the intellectual movements of his day, who does not wish his religion to be a thing apart from his mental development, but that the two may harmoniously blend ; who would fain find a standpoint where "modern science" may cease to be a terror, and "German theology" may be no longer a thing to be dreaded ; should consider once more whether he cannot gain these happy results by reunion with the Church of England. There, if anywhere, on the firm basis of historic creeds, of continuous faith, of twelve hundred years of faithful guarding of Scripture, he may take his stand. Against this rock the troubled waters of controversy may dash, as they often have done before ; the spring-tides of scepticism advance as though to hurl it into the abyss ; they will not destroy it. Such foundations as these are not to be destroyed by passing waves of opinion. Time has shown that, while wave succeeds wave, each breaks in vain ; they are transient, the edifice remains permanent, and he who dwells in it abides secure. "As concerning God's testimonies," this man at least shall come to know that He has "grounded them for ever."

The author having completed his task can only express the hope that one effect of his work may be to produce in the minds of some Wesleyans a warmer interest in, and regard for, the Church of England than they have hitherto felt. He believes that if they could know more of the Church, they would love her more ; in fact, that any dislike or prejudice they entertain towards her is the result of want of knowledge. For himself he would echo words written two hundred years ago : \* “ There is no church whose every part so squares unto my conscience, whose articles, constitutions and customs seem so consonant unto reason, and, as it were, framed to my particular devotion, as this whereof I hold my belief—the Church of England—to whose faith I am a sworn subject, and therefore in a double obligation subscribe unto her articles and endeavour to observe her constitutions.”

\* “Religio Medici,” sec. 5.

THE END.

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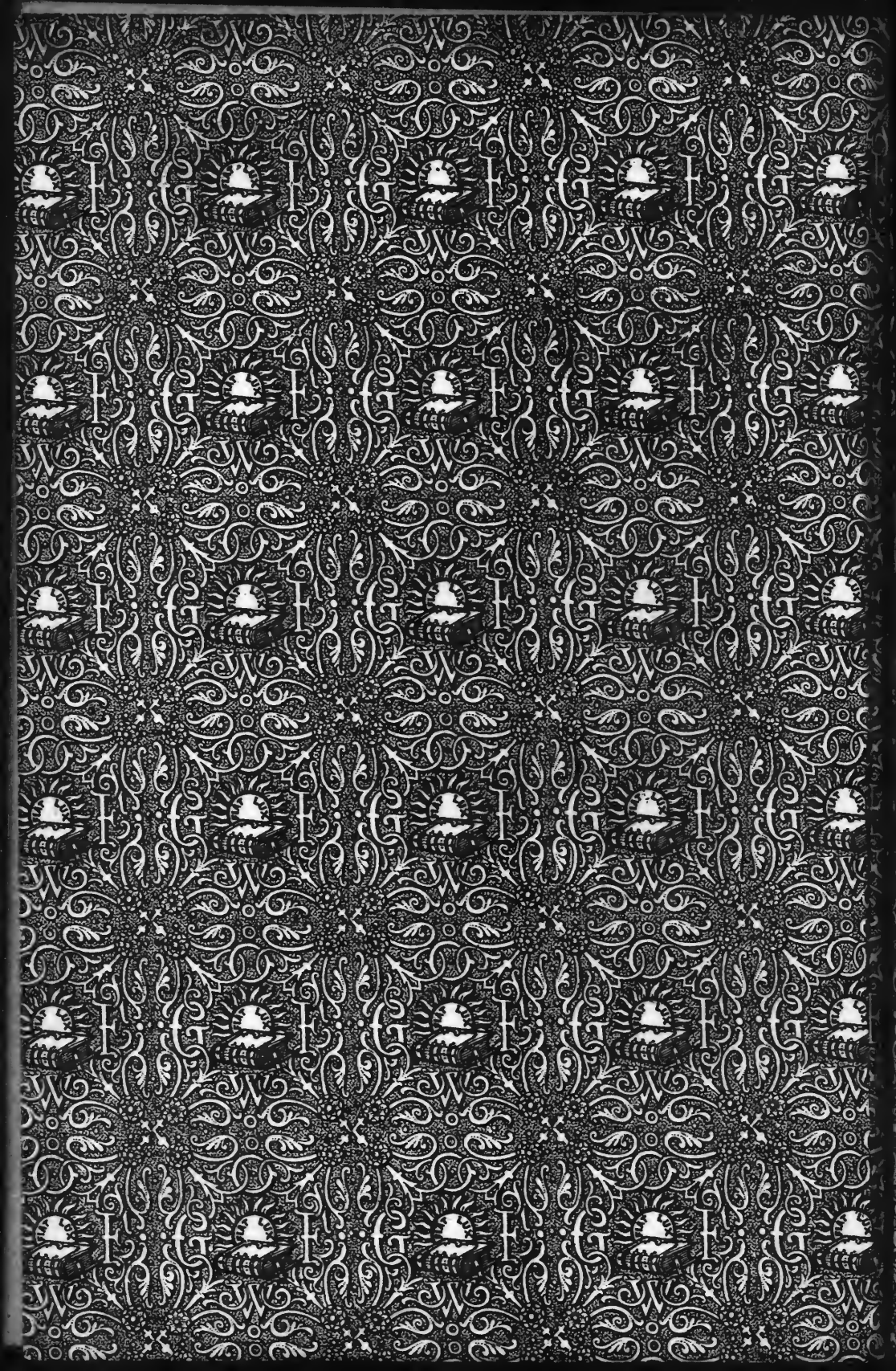
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